



COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS
2007- 2008

A Report

Implemented by
NAVNIRMITI

Supported by
LARSEN & TOUBRO LIMITED.



Background:

NAVNIRMITI is a social enterprise working in the field of Math and Science education, science popularization and promotion activities from the last 15 years. It works on education issues with in-school and out-of school children, corporations and the community.

Our science popularization activities include several science-based mass campaigns during the total solar eclipses in India in the 90's and in South Africa in 2001. It also includes events on Sun study in the year of Sunspots and Transit of Venus through programmes such as 'Sunderstanding'.

In Math education, our emphasis has been mainly in the area of elementary school math teaching and learning. To aid the learning process, NAVNIRMITI has systematically developed activity based learning methodology, also known as Universal Active Math (UAM). This method lays emphasis on learning by doing and understanding things for themselves, as opposed to rote learning.

Quality of Education

The constitution of India guarantees the right to education for every child, and Amendment 86, ensures free and compulsory education for every child between the ages of 6-14. Despite policy and program interventions like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan, issues like ideal number of schools, high rate of drop-out, school facilities, and quality education continue to plague the education system.

Initiatives with children from BMC schools, especially during the Summer Camps, have revealed a number of issues faced by the school and its students.

1. Absolute lack of exposure to several interesting aspects of education makes learning a boring experience for these children.
2. They have little or no support from home for their studies. Children find little encouragement or a non-conducive environment at home for their education
3. Many children come from poor socio-economic background. Children also do not have access to adequate food and nourishment
4. Daily livelihood issues being the priority, children's education usually takes a back seat.
5. Many older children, especially girls, have to take care of their siblings at home often leading them to miss classes in the school
6. Lack of schools for higher classes in nearby areas, eventually lead many children to drop out of school. Invariably number of girls dropping out of school is higher as compared to boys.



Children play near the water pipe at Sai Bangoda village.

Survey Findings:

Before preparing for the summer camp 2007, the team visited the tribal areas of Sai Bangoda and Ultanpada. These areas are located near and in the vicinity of Vihar Lake. On one hand, the communities are struggling to retain their tribal identity and land resources in the face of pressures from the builder's lobby. On the other hand, access to basic services like health and education are also limited for these communities. The community earns its livelihood mainly through fishing, and forest resources. The village was electrified in 2004, and though there are water pipes laid out, they are placed a large distances within the village, making it difficult for women to collect water.

The organization conducted a survey to understand the educational status of the community, with the help of local volunteers. The survey found:

- Parents are largely illiterate, and are away from the house for work for most part of the day.
- While children are enrolled in the nearby municipal schools, lack of parental guidance and supportive academic environment in the house affects their studies.
- Many children, mainly girls, drop out of school by standard 7th.
- Reasons include the expectation of working at home, taking care of siblings, lack of access to a municipal school for standard 7th and above, and early marriages.
- The average age of marriage of girls is 16.
- Those who do manage to complete their 7th class are seldom able to take further education because of lack of awareness and financial inability of the families. Eventually incomplete education hampers their further growth and development.
- The village has no school or primary health care centre. There is only one aanganwadi for young children.

The team understood the need to reach out to this community, through education. Children from the community were invited to attend the summer camp held at NITIE, Paaspoli in 2007. Many children attended the summer camp, and gained a wealth of information and skills. The community members too were more positive in their response after the summer camp. However, the results of the survey were not very heart-warming. It was decided to conduct more activities, through the year and not just focus on specific event-based programs for these communities.

Impact of the survey:

Based on these findings, the organisation proposed to formulate an education-based intervention. It included creating of Community Learning Centres (CLC) for children across different age groups, and including local community participation

Key points of the project:

- CLC's conducted in tribal areas of Sai Bangoda, Ultanpada, Paaspoli and Perubaug from December 2007 to March 2008
- Regular classes for more than 250 students from various classes in batches
 - *Balwadi*
 - Standard 1-2 & Standard 3-4
 - Standard 5-6 & Standard 7-8
 - Classes for students beyond standard 8th
 - Bridge courses
- Classes taken in community spaces, conducted by 25 local educated women, with regular training inputs from the organisation
- Creation of a community kitchen to provide nutritious food for *balwadi* children, involving local women's group.
- Active involvement of parents and community members in providing logistical support
- Corporate support from L& T



A class for students of standard 1 & 2 in progress at the NITIE centre

The Project Process

1. Recruitment of Teachers:

Following the survey, the organisation invited local educated youth to be part of the teaching team. A written test was conducted for the teachers to begin with. It dealt with the concepts and content taught at school level. Twenty five community women made through the exams, and were then given a three day intensive training on various aspects of teaching. Other committed women, but not so educated were also included in the process in the roles of helpers, or part of the community kitchen.



A teacher's training session, facilitated by Dr. Vivek Monterio.

2. Teacher Training

Training, that included tips on how to teach children, recite songs and keeping children engaged through the use of interactive games and exercises. Personality development, concepts of education, key concepts in each subject to be taught were also dealt with during the training. Topics included health, geography creativity through crafts, and science. Eminent teachers and facilitators from the field of both development and academics were involved in the process. Faculties from local B Ed and D Ed colleges also participated in the training programs. The training helped in orienting community women to alternative and interactive methods of learning and facilitation. It enhanced their understanding of the core values of education, and brought a shift in the way they viewed school education.

Weekly Teacher Trainings

Regular capacity building trainings were held for teachers every weekend. Subjects like languages, psychology, math, science, history, geography, and teaching ethics were part of the training program. It was held in the community, and facilitated by academic experts. The weekly training sessions were also a space for teachers to share their experiences, difficulties and evolve solutions for their classes.

3. Meeting with L&T

This was followed by a preliminary meeting with the L&T team, and in December, 2007, at their office. Ms. Sanyogta Raina, Manager, Corporate Social Initiatives, and Ms. Madhuri Purandare, shared their vision of the CLC, experiences, and plans for the project with the teachers.

The meeting enabled the L&T team to meet the teachers and implementing team from Navnirmiti. Teachers shared their learnings from the training, and their plans to implement the project in their respective areas. The L & T team provided inputs on ways of working with young children, and how they can include community participation to strengthen and sustain the process. It was decided to have weekly training sessions for the teachers to strengthen their capacities and enable them to work smoothly.



Meeting of teachers, staff of Navnirmiti, and the L&T CSR team - Ms. Sanyogta Raina, Manager CSR, and Ms. Madhuri Purandare.

4. Syllabus

Soni Yadav, coordinated the creation of the syllabus for all the *balwadi*'s in the project. She had this to say about the preparations that went into making it. "I visited many kindergarten schools with teachers, and checked out their syllabus, and methods of teaching. This primary research helped in training and designing appropriate activities for our classes." Sanjay Kanse, a teacher by profession was instrumental in conceptualising and designing the curriculum for the study classes. The courses for students of bridge classes were designed by Sushma Bakshi.

The objective of starting *balwadi* classes was to add to their understanding of concepts, and retain their interest in schools and academics.

The content had to be such that it would be interesting, non-burdensome for three-year olds, and fit in the three month project. Accordingly, the *balwadi* syllabus focussed on

- Enhancing language skills through poem and songs, and alphabet charts
- Enhance basic counting skills
- Enhancing motor skills and creativity through Jodo Blocks and Rangometry kit.
- Identification of colours and shapes through colour charts, and Mathemat kit.
- Identification of common animals, vegetables and flowers through picture cards and worksheets
- Identification of Body parts
- Basic information about self – including their own names, and those of their parents.

Educational games like Jodo Blocks, Mathemat, and Rangometry, designed by Navnirmiti, were quite useful in keeping the children engaged, and unlocking their creativity. Teacher Rita Pandey, of Paaspoli *balwadi* stated that the games engrossed the children and they always came up with something new and creative, on their own. Mathemat is a tool meant for older children, but was adapted for the *balwadi*. Children had to try and fit the shapes into their respective spaces. Jodo sets including blocks and straws were given to children to explore shapes.



Children at the *balwadi* enact a poem.
Below: Exploring Jodo blocks



The Classes

Classes were conducted in batches for more than 250 students as following:

Balwadi:

The *balwadi* classes had two teachers each. The children were comfortable with the teachers, and enjoyed activities like playing with blocks, or signing songs. The *balwadi*'s were situated in each of the four areas, and approximately 20 – 25 children attended the classes regularly in each location. The class would begin by 11:00 am and end by 2:00 pm and would include food for the children.

Each *balwadi* teacher was given a weekly schedule with the topics to be covered. The following week was reserved for revising the topics. Weekly training sessions held for the teachers were also an opportunity to meet them and understand the issues they were facing in class.

Primary (Standard 1 - 4)

Classes were held from 8:30 to 10:30 or in the evening from 3:00 pm, depending on school timings. The syllabus focused on improving the reading, writing and numerical skills of children. Alphabet charts, songs and games were used extensively for teaching. The classes were conducted in batches with students from 1st & 2nd and 3rd & 4th being conducted separately. Basic maths like additions and subtractions, identifying and counting numbers were included in the sessions, apart from language, and other subjects from the curriculum.

Secondary (Standard 5 – 8)

It was seen that despite being in higher classes, students' skills in reading and writing were not of the expected level. English language was especially singled out by children as being particularly tough to understand. Each session had to begin with developing the basics. Students were asked to read aloud in class. They were also asked to practice writing prose with emphasis on clarity and neatness. Along with these daily activities, the class focussed on building a conceptual foundation in maths and science. Tools like the Math kit and Jodo blocks were used to clear doubts regarding number lines, and concepts of “*dashak*”. Students were also provided with a variety story books in Hindi, Marathi and English to enhance their reading skills.

Apart from this, children also clarified queries related to subjects being currently taught in school. As the exams neared they could be seen revising each subject, seeking the teacher's help wherever required.

Bridge courses

Bridge classes were held for students who had dropped out of school between the ages of 6-14. Some had left school in the primary section, while some, mainly girls, had dropped out after standard 7th. Some of them had dropped out of school to help supplement the household income, while others dropped out to take care of their siblings, and other responsibilities. Though 15 students had enrolled, around 10 students came to the classes held at Sai Bangoda, and Paaspoli regularly. There were however other children too in the village, who have dropped out, but were unable to come to class, because they go to work.

The bridge classes were conducted from 3-6 pm. Children have welcomed the opportunity to attend classes. Their response is positive, and they have a deep desire to study further. The effort was to consolidate their learning's so far, so that they are still able to retain their grasp on reading and writing.



A child tries out an exercise at the centre at Perubaug

5. Administration and Logistics

Classrooms: All the classrooms were based within the community. These spaces were sourced through the network of committed local individuals. Paasposli itself hosted three different classrooms for each group – the *balwadi*, primary and secondary standards.

Community Kitchen: Only one kitchen was commissioned, and it was based at Paaspoli, NITIE. However food prepared at this centre catered to the *balwadi*'s at all the four locations. The food was prepared by a three-member women's team in Paaspoli.

6. Monitoring & Evaluation:

Each location had a coordinator from Navnirmiti, who made regular visits to the centres, and supported the teachers and the community in their work. There were also coordinators to look into solely academic issues. Coordinators had a range of issues to tackle from convincing parents to send their children, to providing the class with clean drinking water. The entire project was coordinated by Raju Kamble from Navnirmiti, responsible for the smooth functioning of the project through its three-month run. Harish Jadhav coordinated the kitchen resources, ensuring that quality food was available to all *balwadi* children across the project area.

The other main task was to support the teachers on the academic front. Satish Utkar brought his B Ed skills in his role as the academic coordinator. The team was also responsible for conducting parents meeting, and motivating students to come to class regularly.

The team had conducted a Base line study at the beginning of the project to gauge the level of knowledge among children. A final baseline was then taken at the end of the project to study the impact.

Events and Programs

Children's Picnic

Towards the end of the project, an outdoor picnic was organised for all children attending the CLC. Children responded with great enthusiasm to the visit. The picnic was held at the grounds around Vihar Lake.

Vihar Lake used to be a great picnic spot for children, with parks, slides and swings for their amusement. However, the park has fallen to disuse after the closure of the lake for the general public. Despite its proximity to Paaspoli, and Perubaug, many children were coming to the lake for the first time. Children had fun exploring the premises, trying out the slides and swings and finally having their lunch under the open skies.



Children and volunteers at the picnic held at Vihar Lake

Farewell program for Teachers

Towards the end of the project, a meeting was scheduled for all the teachers, the team from L& T and Navnirmiti. Individuals who had helped the process of setting up and implementing the CLC's in the community too were invited for the meeting

The meeting was a sharing of experiences of the three month long project of everyone involved in the CLC. The teachers were given a certificate for their contribution in the process. Most of the teachers would be part of the summer camp, and the future processes of CLC in the community.

At the meeting, the teachers shared how they feel more confident – in terms of behaviour and skills in teaching. As Jyoti Francis, Managing Executive, Navnirmiti, put it, a strong skill based group has emerged from the process. She hoped that the three-month experiences would show the way for future activities in the community. Ms. Sanyogita Raina, Manager, CSR, L & T congratulated the team for their commitment, and contribution to children's education in their community. She also hoped that the partnership between L & T and Navnirmiti would continue to grow in strength.

Sanjay Kanse from NN who was instrumental in training the teachers, said that our efforts should reflect in the behaviour and academic improvement of children



Ms. Kolhekar, teacher at the centre at Ultanpada accepts her certificate during farewell program for teachers.

Project Observations and Suggestions

Teachers:

- Most of the teachers come from a non-teaching background. It is important to train the teachers more thoroughly in teaching skills.
- Teachers need to have a set of games and exercises with them that can be used in class.
- The weekly training program has been an excellent ongoing process of providing inputs and receiving feedback from the teachers.
- Weekly training sessions should include a segment on how to best teach the topics scheduled for the coming week. This will help teachers clarify doubts and fine tune their methodology
- Teachers need to contribute in the creation of syllabus, and session plans for the week
- Each teacher too should contribute in terms of devising puzzles, or games, and activities for the centre. Each teacher should be adapting these games and exercises for the class.
- There should be more scope for teachers to do research, study, and plan their sessions accordingly.

Focus areas for training:

- Games, songs and group exercises
- Activity Based and interactive sessions
- Facilitation skills
- Curriculum subjects in math, science and languages. (especially for higher classes)
- The right to education
- Rights of the child
- Gender-sensitive teaching

Focus on teaching methodologies:

- The scope and possibilities of alternate education
- Demonstration of sessions in the classroom by trainers
- Demonstration of methodologies using arts, crafts and other teaching aids.

A checklist of points based on teacher's experiences:

1. Listen to children
2. Be patient
3. Do not rush them to complete the syllabus
4. Make sure each child understands the subject before moving on to the next
5. Invent and evolve new games, songs for the class.
6. Its not a race to finish the syllabus as per the time table
7. Include stories, drawings, colours, toys and clay – things that engage their minds as well as their hands
8. Provide personal attention to each child
9. Make your classes relevant to the group
10. create an environment conducive to learning
11. Do not hit children or threaten them
12. Make the classroom a child-friendly space
13. Let children be.

A checklist for guest facilitators:

1. Do not undermine the authority of the teacher in front of the students
2. Discuss issues outside the class, and not in front of children

Students:**Learning Skills:**

1. Most of the children had difficulty in reading, writing and understanding concepts; commiserate to their age and academic class.
2. Teachers had to start reading and writing exercises from the scratch for many students from the higher classes.
3. English and Math were found to be the most difficult subjects
4. There is a need to give separate time for students who have trouble in reading and writing.
5. Need to incorporate these timings, as well as specific teacher's training in the monthly/ annual plan

Learning Environment:

1. Students from *balwadi* to the higher classes have said that they enjoyed coming to the centre.
2. Children are keen to learn more, and enjoy the teaching methods employed in class.
3. Students, including those in classes 7th and 8th enjoyed the process of combining learning with fun. The various games were a great attraction, and helped establish a rapport with children in the beginning.
4. Nutritious food provided to the children also scored heavily with parents. Parents used to bring their wards, willingly and on time for the *balwadi* classes.
5. Children also expressed their surprise, when they were never hit, despite indiscipline.

Impact of the CLC on students:

1. Improved understanding of mathematical concepts - from numbers to geometry
2. Increased efforts to enhance reading and writing skills through regular practice
3. Increased interest in mathematics among children

Classroom environment:

1. Classrooms need to be a brighter and child friendly space, so that children enjoy being in the class.
2. Currently, as most of the classroom spaces have been lent by the community, not much change has been done within the space. There is scope for more colourful walls, picture decorations, bulletin boards, and displays and charts within the classrooms.
3. CLC classrooms can be similar look and feel, to ensure continuity and branding.

Balwadi Environment:

1. Every *balwadi* had a number of children aged less than three years.
2. Teachers had to struggle to retain their attention, while teaching older children.
3. Much effort went into reducing distractions, and in trying to maintain discipline in class.
4. We need to invite children who are three years and above for the *balwadi*.
5. Younger children are unable to cope with what's being done in class. They have to be looked at as a separate group, with different teaching requirements and timings.

Balwadi Syllabus

6. Each session could be dedicated to one topic/ theme being taught with different methodologies like songs, games or visits.
7. The entire plan should be devised so that it allows for gradual intake of information by the children, in terms of information and complexity.
8. There should be as many activities as there are children in the class, so that each day, each child can try something new, and the activities can be rotated
9. Arts, crafts, stories, clay, colours, and a variety of material can be incorporated to make learning fun.
10. *Balwadi* students are expected to continue with the CLC, even as they proceed to the higher standards. Accordingly, topics have to be planned keeping them in mind.
11. At the same time, there are children who are quite young, and will remain in the *balwadi* the next year as well, perhaps going into the formal school only in the year after that. The syllabus will need to contain something new for them as well.

Parents:

1. Regular parent-teacher-team meetings are required within the community.
2. Parents need greater awareness of existing issues in schools, and how they can address it.
3. Parents need to be kept in the loop about their children's performance.
4. Regular interactions with parents should include issues related to their rights as parents and importance of education

Community:

1. Regular events in the community involving children and the CLC can bring in greater involvement of the community.
2. Involve the community in other organisation activities.
3. Emphasise on mobilisation of community women in CLC activities.
4. Steady participation of the community members can help a smooth transfer of ownership of the CLC from the organisation to the community



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Annexure:

1. List of teachers
2. List of Area/ classes/ Number of students