

# Shikshamitra

## *An overview of 2005-06*

Shikshamitra, a centre for open learning and education resources, was born out of the conviction that unlike our present education system, a schooling system of 10-12 years should prepare students to either go for higher studies or branch out to the vocational line and that educational resources should be gathered and preserved systematically for both academicians and laymen.

The purpose of school education, we believe, is just not to help a student fetch the school-leaving certificate but to equip him or her with the right skills for the future and develop him/her as a good human being.

Unfortunately, the Indian education system, through its fixed — and often outdated — syllabus for everybody and emphasis on bookish learning without caring for the aptitude and need of the students, serve only the intelligent — and generally the rich and upper middle class — students while branding a large section as failures. The poor, with very little financial means and less exposure, suffers the most.

Hence, the need for an alternative schooling system, which focuses on redefining not only the curriculum and pedagogy but also the very purpose of a school.

The basic features of such a school would be:

- Much more variation and flexibility in curriculum, teaching method and timing
- Larger emphasis on some basic knowledge-skills-values, including very important life skills missing in the present system and an ecological perspective
- A sharp decrease in the volume of useless information
- Use of a much larger set of learning sources/avenues
- School as an active guide to further learning and vocation
- School as a learning centre for children, their families and the community as a whole
- School interacting not only with students but also with their parents and the community

The other side of Shikshamitra, the Education Resource Centre (henceforth referred to as ERC), aims to build up a library of education-related books and information for teachers, researchers, government officials, educationists and mediapersons, provide documentation service and establish itself as a platform for education-related meetings, seminars and workshops.

## **LAYING THE GROUND**

The first task was to earmark the area where such an organisation would be most useful and then find a suitable building in that locality. The Census 2001 data and a few other surveys of Kolkata were studied, people in the related fields consulted, a number of areas visited. Finding both the appropriate area and the right building there proved to be quite a daunting task. Finally, we found two apartments, measuring 2,200 sq ft, in Chetla — an area identified in our survey as a needy one.

Next came reaching out to the community in around 10 slums in Wards 74 and 82, explaining to them our viewpoint, allaying the fear that we won't close the school one fine day, leaving their children in lurch, and finally prodding them to send their children to our school.

Sukhendu Santra, a social worker who had worked with CINI-ASHA, an NGO working with underprivileged children, for long, and Nandita Ghosh, a local who is adept at teaching and commercial production of embroidery and has a long experience of working with many NGOs, were instrumental in building a bridge with these slums.

Efforts were also on to prepare a student-friendly, participatory curriculum. Several people with expertise in teaching different subjects were consulted and requested to make alternative syllabi for the

school. Sujit Sinha, co-ordinator of Swanirvar, and Sudeshna Sinha, a special education teacher running a school for slum- and street-dwellers for over a decade and now co-ordinator of Swanirvar's urban school Shikshamitra, regularly evaluated them and gave their inputs, besides arranging funds, selecting teachers and updating materials and notes for teachers' training, which Sudeshna had been holding for several schools since a long time.

The flats also needed some structural adjustments like dividing the rooms into classrooms and building more toilets. An architect, Richa Bose, set up moveable partitions of bamboo and thatch to divide the rooms as per our need. We also bought a computer-printer, music system and a VCD player among others. A TV was received as donation.

### **THE JOURNEY BEGINS**

Finally, the school started at 9 pm on April 18, with a grant from Indienhilfe of Herrsching, a German funding agency.

### **THE SHIKSHAMITRA TEAM**

First come the **Children**.

Although 21 children had enrolled before the school started, 15 students joined at the beginning. When the school closed for summer on May 20, the number stood at 20. By the end of July, it was 21 — eight of them dropouts, the rest from local schools. With the admission of three girls (Class V of Malati High School) and one boy (Class VI of Kailash Vidyamandir) in early January 2006, Shikshamitra had 25 students in the morning school by the end of this academic year.

The children were initially divided into two groups based on their competency level. In October, they were rearranged into three groups.

Although eager to learn and good at retention, the students were initially very undisciplined and disruptive, not ready to listen to any instruction and always bringing their neighbourhood quarrels to the school. Even Sudeshna's over-a-decade association with Ashirvad, a school for slum- and street-children in Bowbazar, and Sukhendu's long experience in CINI-ASHA did not anticipate such a pandemonium.

Situation improved a little by the time they went for summer, but the holiday took them back to their original state. Situation became so difficult and frustrating that in late July-early August, the teachers wondered if the school could be continued. It also became clear that a few of them would need counselling. That the students from these comparatively "more settled" slums in Chetla would be so unmanageable, often a sign of acute insecurity, intrigued us.

This is not to say that there was nothing positive about these children. Many of them usually finished their homework and were very enthusiastic about the school that, according to all of them, was so different from whatever they had experienced before.

That they really wanted Shikshamitra to carry on became clear when in August an exasperated Sudeshna asked them if they wanted the school to close down. They protested and gradually things started changing for better.

A few measures like introducing a meditation session after the lunch break, strict implementation of the behaviour code and rewarding the students for certain behaviour and actions every month helped a lot. Although the prize itself was very inexpensive like an eraser or a pencil, the aim was to encourage them to consciously choose the right behaviour.

Starting the **afternoon session** (from 2.30 pm to 4.30 pm) from August that allowed the students to return to school after the regular school hour (9 am to 1.30 pm) to play, dance, draw, do their homework, watch certain programmes on TV or simply sleep, and expanding the classroom into the neighbourhood through activities like a visit to the horticulture garden, mapping the school and its

surrounding and interviewing their parents and the elders in the locality to know the history of the area inculcated in the children a sense of belonging towards the school and established a bond between the students and the teachers. By early January, the students even started calling teachers at home for various reasons.

Special dance, drama and magic classes were started during the "open" hour, where students from both morning and evening sessions participated and were even allowed to bring their friends.

### **And the rest**

The centre began with five full-timers and part-timers. Shikshamitra — the school and ERC together, needs at least 6 passionate and skilled full-timers to fulfill its goal of creating an alternative secondary curriculum and making it the hub of creative enterprises related to school education. Now, we have only three — Sudeshna, Mohua and Barun.

✦ **Sudeshna Sinha** — The co-ordinator of Shikshamitra, Sudeshna is teaching primarily Bangla and history. With her training in special education and long experience in teaching such children, she has also guided other teachers to formulate their study material and decide their way of teaching.

✦ **Arup Dasgupta**: Hired as a full-time maths and EVS teacher, he turned out to be a misfit and left in mid-May.

✦ **Mohua Dutta**: A librarian by training, she was originally meant to do the documentation and take care of the ERC in its formative stage. But Arup's continuous absenteeism and then departure forced a nervous Mohua, also a science graduate, to step into his shoes. She gradually gained confidence and also helped many students to get rid of maths phobia.

✦ **Atreyee Day**: Initially a full-time arts and craft and English teacher, she has chosen to be a part-time arts and craft teacher since June.

✦ **Sukhendu Santra**: Besides playing an important role as the bridge between the community and the school, he also teaches life education and health

✦ **Biswajit Chitrakar**: A former student of CINI-ASHA, Biswajit joined as the caretaker and games teacher and has played an important role in the day-to-day running of Shikshamitra. He is also part of the team teaching theatre.

✦ **Puranjan and Moushumi Tarafdar**: Musicians by training, the couple joined as part-time singing and dancing teachers, respectively. While Puranjan completed the year, Moushumi left in September.

✦ **Poonam Agarwal**: Involved with the project from the very preliminary stage, she is our part-time accountant.

✦ **Maura Hurley**: An American settled in Kolkata and with widespread experience in teaching English, she is with us from August to conduct spoken English classes.

✦ **Gopal Das**: A clay artisan and father of a student, Puja Das, he has started taking weekly clay-work classes from August

✦ **Barun Sarkar**: A Jadavpur University alumnus with experience in research and editorial work, he joined as the in-charge of the ERC in September.

✦ **Suchetana Banerjee**: A JU student and trained in Kathakali and Bharatnatyam, she replaced Moushumi as a part-timer in September.

✦ **Ashok Bose**: On students' demand, he started teaching magic from September on a part-time basis.

✦ **Ankur Raychoudhury**: Atreyee's refusal to teach English sent the school on a hunt for a teacher and Ankur, a comparative literature postgraduate from Jadavpur University and a teacher at a reputed

school near Kolkata, joined us in October. Actively involved in theatre, he is also our drama teacher, along with Barun and Biswajit. But he has been working as a part-timer since January.

### **THE TEACHING-LEARNING**

In a school like Shikshamitra, the syllabi are based on the need of the students, who are divided into different groups based on their competency level, and not age. There are certain skills in every subject that a student needs to acquire before graduating to the next level.

**Bangla:** At the beginning, the lower competency group of nine children, who had supposedly finished Class II-IV, could write his/her own name but failed to recognise it in a sentence. They could barely read a few words or sentences without understanding them. So it was a basic literacy class. The other group of 11 children was better, with eight of them having the competency level of Class IV-V.

For both groups, the initial instrument was story-telling and drawing. Using interesting stories like *Buno Hansh (Wild Duck)* by Lila Majumdar, various issues and concepts, such as directions, war, food, housing and soldiers, were discussed.

Interestingly, both groups were quite enthralled by the library. Even the students who could barely read flipped through books – often full of colourful pictures – enthusiastically.

However, in spite of regular use of games and special methods, the junior class could learn only the alphabet and write two-letter words without *matras* (a vowel suffix or prefix to the main alphabet) in the first two months. But they could memorise poems, were great at drawing pictures and then weaving a story around it.

During the same period, the senior class had acquired decent reading abilities. Lots of listening comprehensions helped them to learn answering verbally, writing down while listening, drawing related pictures and then acting out the story. They had also learnt *juktakkhar* (joint alphabet). Attention had been paid on the sentence structure as many of them were not good at it.

By September-October, almost all the seniors (10 out of 11) could write paragraphs, stories and essays instantly, with seven of them even being able to summarise short pieces. Their handwritings also improved a lot. They started writing their own letter of absence and then wrote to their pen friends in Germany, made through the funding agency. The seniors were often asked to write short paragraphs on whatever they had learnt in science and social studies classes.

Three of the nine junior students also showed a lot of progress during this period and seemed to be ready to graduate to the next level.

By January, the children also started their own Newsletter in Bengali with some interesting incidents in their locality, in the school and some from newspapers and put it up in the library.

Ankur even taught Tagore's *Dak Ghar* to the senior group, with an overwhelming response from them.

**English:** Although students were eager to learn English, they laughed at the idea that they could ever speak the language. Apart from teaching alphabets, several aids like a three-minute video (*Genki English*) and story-telling with simultaneous drawings were adopted at the initial stage. Our first task was to break their inhibition by making them repeat words and sentences in English without bothering about the structure and often even meanings.

A number of interesting stories modified by Sudeshna were narrated along with cutouts in the senior class and comprehensions, vocabulary, memory and sentence-making exercises were carried out based on them. Students also used cutouts to create scenes of the stories. By the end of May, the senior group

was ready to read simple storybooks. But unfortunately we could not find anything that needs language competency of the Class I but offers content of Class III-V level.

The junior class was, however, such a disaster that it had to be discontinued for a while. They could not even learn very simple words, often widely used in Bangla, like bottle, ball, bat.

Atreyee quit as the English teacher in June. On July 27, Maura conducted a song and dance class in English and decided to come every Tuesday to teach the students functional English. Within a few classes, the students, especially the senior group, tried to speak in English, however broken that may be, during the class. Ankur's joining in October made it a daily affair.

By January, the junior most and slowest class was picking up English faster than Bengali.

The two higher groups also are picking up the language fast. Five of the senior class even translated their Bengali letters to the German pen friends into English. All the children could follow English instructions and were trying to read new words phonetically.

**Environmental studies (EVS) and science:** The focus in the first month was on observation using all five senses like recognising smells and sounds blindfolded, identifying different colours, using colour wheels, splitting sunlight with mirror etc. Both groups were taught together but the worksheets were different. Topics like what senses do you use to buy a particular item from the market were also discussed. Basic elements of the nature were introduced one by one. For example, water was the theme of the second month. Children did a survey of how much water each member of one's family use every day and then Mohua taught them to draw bar diagrams using these data. Tree was the next to be covered.

By September-October, the students had gained considerable observation abilities and were being able to work on their own — both in groups and individually. They gather data while speaking to a person and make several types of diagrams to represent their facts.

Anirban Hazra, holding a doctorate in chemistry from Princeton University, held workshops with teachers on making simple models and toys based on scientific principles.

**Mathematics:** The lower competency group didn't even know the numbers 1-9 in Bangla. Both groups were taught the numbers, both Bengali and English, and basic methods like place value, addition and subtraction at the beginning. Various units were used to teach them measurement — starting with rough estimation of their own height, length of the classroom etc. Gradually, they learnt volume measurement.

The junior group take a lot of time learning the numbers till 99, understanding place value and the sequence of the numbers, doing simple additions and subtractions etc.

The senior group, too, had conceptual problems, making them falter on problem sums till July. They were introduced to simple geometrical problems with the help of matchsticks around July.

By September-October, both groups showed considerable progress, with the weaker ones coming forward on their own to Mohua for help.

By January, the senior-most class, which was scared of maths, started enjoying it and actually asked for more challenging sums.

**Social studies / History:** Sudeshna prodded the children into enquiring about the past and trying to compare it with the present and analyse the data they gather by interviewing old people in the locality. The students, especially the elder ones, were taught to make questionnaires and interview people. The students were also encouraged to make their own timelines and those of their family members and sometimes of the objects brought from home to make them feel that history is made not just by the kings and queens but by whatever is happening in our day-to-day life. A chapter of a book written by Sandip Bandyopadhyay, a writer and resource person on history, was used to inculcate this idea into them.

Sandip himself took a few classes from mid-December to early January and guided the students to find out the history of Chelta, their locality by interviewing a few old people, including a student's 85-year-old grandfather.

**Life education and health:** Sukhendu introduced the children to some basic concepts required in daily life like identifying four directions, following verbal instructions to go to a place or tracing an object or an address in an area. They were also taught to read a map and draw a map of their own area after consulting the ward map.

The students were also asked to make a list of the five most widespread diseases in their slums and prevention measures for the most frequent ones were discussed. All of them learned to make ORS.

A lot of group discussions were held to make them aware about personal hygiene and its importance. They were also asked to note down each family member's different habits like cutting nails, covering drinking waters, use of toilet and soaps, etc.

By the end of 2005, a chart was made to keep a record of the student's hygiene habits, which was filled up every week by one of the students after checking his/her classmates.

The work was also distributed among students on a daily basis to keep the classrooms clean, shut the windows and toilets, and fill up the containers meant for drinking water. They have started taking decisions on their own in this area.

The effect of the nutrition classes became clear from a mother's meeting where they said that the children were trying to estimate the nutrition value of their food and demanding more of some items and less of the others for a balanced diet.

## **BEYOND BOOKS**

There are a few other components like music, drama, games, arts and craft. Generally treated as extra in a curriculum, a preliminary training in at least one of them, we feel, is essential for the allround development of a child.

**Arts and craft:** Atreyee helped students to illustrate stories learnt in language classes. In doing so, they have learnt to use various media-methods like drawing, water-colour painting, pastels and crayons, scrap papers etc. They often illustrated a whole story by pasting drawings, scarp papers and paper cuttings etc on boards, walls and plywood sheets. The children were also encouraged in all classes to interpret their lessons and then draw it. Children themselves painted the cheap wooden racks for the library.

Some outsiders interested in the afternoon arts classes could not be accommodated as our timings clashed with those of their regular high schools.

**Song and dance:** Basics of rhythm and scale were taught initially, followed by simple songs with a lead singer and dance figures. Students were prodded to learn new words and their meanings from the songs.

Swanirvar conducted a three-day session on performing arts for both morning full-timers and evening girls from May 23-25. On 24<sup>th</sup>, even a group of outsiders were allowed to take part in it, following a request from a local club, Kolahal Goshthi.

Suchetana's twice-a-week dance classes have become very popular with the students, and even a few boys who were initially hesitant about joining, took some interest in it. But the numbers started dwindling and it had to be stopped in March.

**Clay work:** Being held as a weekly class for all since August.

**Computer:** Tata Consultancy Service promised to donate five desktops in December but we are yet to receive them, delaying elementary classes for our students and a small batch of part-timers.

**Activity period:** From January 2006, the first hour in the morning school have been kept aside as "activity period" on 4 days, when students were to learn and perform song, dance and drama, do exercises, etc. But this would need more variety and planning.

**Theatre:** Ankur's special theatre class, though initially very popular, had to be discontinued in February because of lack of students.

**Magic:** Although the students asked for the once-a-week magic class, gradually very few attended it, and that's too irregularly. Hence, it was stopped in February. However, a few students had learnt some tricks well.

### THE EVENING SCHOOL

During the preparatory phase in February-March 2005, we had met a group of girls ageing 15 and above who wanted to "learn something" as part-timers. Some of them persisted Sukhendu whenever he went to the community on his weekly visits.

The NGO DRCSC, popularly known as the Service Centre, was also interested in running an evening school for these girls.

So the evening school started on May 17 — a little earlier than we planned — with 15 girls. Four of them were studying in a day school as well.

The curriculum is a combination of several skills clubbed as "life education", including elementary education with emphasis on simple arithmetic, taught by DRCSC's Kakoli Deb and the specific skill of embroidery and production of jute items imparted by Nandita Ghosh, who has been long associated with teaching and commercial production of such materials.

Kakoli also taught them several job-related skills like facing an interview board while Sukhendu, on a few occasions, engaged the girls in group dynamics games.

Finally, nine girls completed the six-month course and were awarded a certificate on January 4, 2006. Four of them even made embroidery materials like handkerchiefs and jute items commercially.

Three girls have decided to get admitted to the Govt. Polytechnic at New Alipore for a six-month certificate course on "cutting for dresses" — our first attempt in guiding students to further vocational training on their way to adopting a vocation.

A couple of new girls have showed interest to join us from the next session in April.

### THE OTHERS

**Counselling:** Several students with severe behavioral problems were counselled by NGO Samikkhani. We also took some help from another organisation called Mon Foundation. One of the students, Puja Haldar, and her mother have agreed to visit Samikkhani for further assistance.

**Celebrations:** The children hardly had any idea about most of the days celebrated for different reasons like Rabindranath Tagore's birthday. But on May 9 (his birthday), they enjoyed his childhood stories, especially those on his abhorrence towards the conventional school system. They were also told about his experiment in Santiniketan. Similarly, some other days like Independence Day (August 15) and German Day (Feb. 6) were celebrated and the children were told about their significance.

On November 14, we celebrated the Children's Day. The teachers performed for the students. Sudeshna called every student and read aloud a short write-up on him/her. It was a hit among the students. At the end, everybody sat together and had lunch.

Both Hindu and Muslim students were very keen on celebrating Saraswati Puja. The Muslims flatly refused to link the goddess with any religion, saying she is the symbol of "learning". The kids made their own idol with the help of the clay-work teacher and invited many of their 'outsider' friends on the day.

The children spent 3 hours at Indian Museum in Kolkata on Feb 25 and were amazed by almost everything, starting from the building itself.

**Friday Special:** Since July 1, Friday afternoons were kept aside as children's performance day. Although initially it was very chaotic, gradually it improved. On January 13, three students (Anita, Pradip and Shajahan) staged a magic show quite successfully. On Feb 17, students surprised their parents and also teachers, by enacting how they spent their whole day at Shikshamitra and what they liked about the school.

**Parent and community meetings:** Through out the year, Shikshamitra's teachers met parents, generally in group and whenever necessary individually, both at the school and in the locality. Sukhendu visited the community every week and spoke to both parents of our students and others in the area. Community meetings were arranged to explain our work and answer their queries.

**Visitors:** Being a school based in Kolkata, the school received a number of visitors, including many well-wishers, from the beginning like Soumya Chakraborty, who played the *ektara* (a single-string instrument) and sang a few songs for the students, Helen and Anja from Germany, Dipankar Purokayastha from Los Angeles and Pravina kadakia from Houston and many others.

Elisabeth Kreuz, Shibani and Raju of Indienhilfe spent a day on November 18. Sabine from IH-Germany and Shibani of IH-Kolkata spent Feb 17 with us and attended the Friday Open session. Another German visitor, Tim Khristman, and Raju of IH-Kolkata came on 8 March.

Bulbul Bakshi, the head of Samikkhiani and a member of our advisory board, visited the school on March 13. Another adviser, Br. Brendan Macarthaigh, came to Shikshamitra on March 8. Macarthaigh, himself experimenting with an alternative education system for long, attended each class and gave his feedback to the teachers.

### **THE LEARNING CENTRE**

In May, three AID chapters in the US — San Diego, Austin and Houston — granted up to \$9,000 for the ERC. The centre was furnished in October and the materials collected so far were arranged. Barun, with Mohua's help, started cataloguing them, along with building a database. We plan to establish contacts with similar institutions from the second year.

Translation work from Hindi like the Madhya Pradesh government's textbook *Khushi-Khushi*, and in some cases English like *Chief Seattle's Letter*, to Bengali have been started.

Various teaching-learning materials (TLMs) developed and used by Shikshamitra's teachers are likely to be ready by June 2006 to be shared with outsiders.

Randy Wang, a Princeton University computer science professor, and his student Nitin, who are developing programmes to use IT for teachers' training and making audiovisuals for children, visited the school in December. Randy came back in the first week of February with Urvashi Sahni, the director of a Lucknow school, Study Hall, and gifted us a CPU, hard discs, special DVD player, camera and about 200 films made at Study Hall both for training teachers and for direct use with children. He also taught a few staffers to make these films for documenting Shikshamitra's way of functioning.

### **SUMMING UP**

In spite of a positive feedback from Shikshamitra's students and their parents, it's becoming clear that many parents find it a bit difficult to accept it as a "proper" school, mainly for the absence of a government stamp. They would obviously take time to get adjusted to such a schooling system. But it also seems that to make the school — all three sessions — sustainable, we might have to extend our geographical periphery.



## **SHIKSHAMITRA ( Swanirvar) : 2006-07**

Our experimental school and Education Resource Centre ( ERC) in Kolkata has completed two years. The school started on April 18, 2005. The ERC is just taking off. Our main funders are Indienhilfe ( Herrsching – Germany) ; AID ( Austin, Houston , San Diego ) , Wipro ( new addition in 2006-07).

### ***Harek Rakam Ba / Bal Vividha : The Big Education Festival :***

For three months between July – Nov 2006 , almost all the energies of Shikshamitra went into organizing and conducting this big education festival called Bal Vividha . Over the last 7 years this has been organized by an NGO Comet Media Foundation in Mumbai and they offered it to Shikshamitra – Swanirvar to hold this in Kolkata . This was taken up amidst a lot of apprehension regarding our ability to organise such an event smoothly . It was re-christened Harek Rakam Ba, and was held from 17-20 November at Birla Industrial and Technology Museum. Targeting the Bengali medium govt schools of Kolkata , (i) we had a total footfall of about ~ 5,000 children . (ii) 130 persons registered for the one day colloquium on vocational education including three outstation speakers from MP, Delhi , and Pune. (iii) There were 17 full day teacher’s workshop sessions attended by 160 teachers from 50 schools of Kolkata and suburbs including some from Swanirvar rural area. Subjects covered were English , Maths , Environment, Life Skills, Heritage , and Health (iv) There were 25 interactive corners where children did various hands on activities (v) 7 films were shown with some discussions (vi) There were 26 cultural shows – 14 inside an auditorium and 12 on an outdoor lawn.

The two principal collaborators were Children International Sahay and Development Research & Communication Service Centre. The major funders were Sir Ratan Tata Trust , Wipro Foundation, Asha for Education (Seattle, USA) , Association for India’s Development (USA) , and Hongkong & Shanghai Bank Corporation. As a result of this festival a fairly large number of schools and teachers know about Shikshamitra paving the way for future collaborations .

### ***The Shikshamitra students***

Morning full-time school (8 am to 1:30 pm): The timing was increased by an hour whereas last year it was from 9 am.. At the end of its first academic year on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006 there were 25 students in the morning school. Some new students joined and some left and in Sep 2006 the total morning roll strength was 30. Nine more have quit for various reasons and on 31<sup>st</sup> march 2007 the roll strength was down to 21.

Evening life skill school (5:30 pm to 7:30 pm): 8 new had joined in May 2006 . On 30<sup>th</sup> September there were 10 students in evening , 5 old and 5 new and on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007 there were 8 students .

Evening Computer classes (5 to 7 pm) : This started from Jan 2007 with the help of Uddami , an NGO with experience in computer education. On 31<sup>st</sup> March there are 20 students in two batches each undergoing 2 one hour classes per week.

So on 31st March 2007 , all together Shikshamitra had a total of about 50 students.

### ***The Staff ( Annex 1)***

Getting the right number and right kind of staff was our biggest headache. 16 staff members left during the year for various reasons. Out of the many who joined in 06-07, three are continuing.

The following kinds of meetings were held by the staff.

- (i) Three meetings per month :- two one hour review meetings 15 days apart and one whole day meeting on last Friday of the month till October 2006 ; none in November due to the festival ; 10 such meetings between Dec 2006 and March 2007.
- (ii) Whole day brainstorming held for three days in April 5<sup>th</sup> , 12<sup>th</sup> , 20<sup>th</sup> to work on curriculum, detailed year plan , admissions and some administrative matters . The 2nd brainstorming was at Santiniketan from 9-11 Dec 2006 to do a listing of achievements , problem-issues and future directions.

### ***The Morning School ( Content and Process)***

Like last year we used various texts instead of giving any one text book to the children. This year we have “produced” a lot of our Own Material ( *Annex 2*) mostly based on the work done in the previous academic year 2005-06 . In Art & Craft a lot of work was done this year which will lead to “commercial” production next year ( *Annex 3* ) . A special course this year was on Practical Electricity ( *Annex 4* ) between July 06 – Jan 07 by local club secretary Kishor Ghosh who is also a professional electrician The senior children were taught First Aid . These seniors then had to teach the

juniors. “Production” oriented Theatre classes started in May 2006 involving acting , singing , dancing, script writing and prop production with division of responsibilities among children. Although this was stopped due to children’s irregularity, it was a big learning experience for the children and they have used these communication skills on numerous occasions. Swanirvar KKB team came on 16-18 April 2006 to revise Song –Dance items taught in 2005 and to teach many new items , some of which are very popular. In both Bengali and English some of the children have made tremendous progress in reading , writing. But more importantly many Language classes are places to seriously discuss and argue various issues , even contemporary ones like Nandigram or a fight with the local police ( *Annex 5* ) . And write – draw-act- sing according to one’s abilities allowing even those who cannot read-write properly to participate fully. The weakest children were also able to pick up reasonable skills in reading Bengali through the “Whole Word” approach and a variety of TLM including the “barakhari chart”. Watching and analysing Films( *Annex 6* ) was carefully integrated with the Language – Communication class. Maths-Science suffered somewhat due to irregularity of teachers ; but with new teacher joining in December 2006 , things are again progressing well.

The overall impact of the last two years intensive experimentation to make the children “independent learners” , “creative in utilizing their own strong points” , “cooperative learners”, and able to become “courageous and change” can be seen (a) from the collection of Stories that they have created ( orally and in writing) and drawn and which will soon be published by us as reading materials for others. (b) from the way they went about their one month assignment to write the History of Shikshamitra ( *Annex 7* ) , their choice of methods , materials , communicating their findings , articulating their leanings , arguing their point of view (c) the way some of the “weakest” have accomplished certain things ( *Annex 8* ) (d) the shape of the Final Exams ( *Annex 9* ) held twice so far ( March 2006 and March 2007 ) which allowed children to express in various ways what they wanted to convey; there was almost no memorizing of facts or “right” definitions and answers ; even within one grade , several level of question papers were made according to the children’s abilities ; there were plenty of practicals ; there were “group” exams ; seeing – listening - drawing – painting – singing – recitations everything was mixed up. It was such a creative outpouring that all teachers and children had great fun.

This year the first attempt at Apprenticeship ( *Annex 10* ) was made with Pradip Mondol utilizing his love for plants. Children’s committees and the Award system continued with some changes ( *Annex 11* ) . A new feature towards the end of the year was the Open Zone / Free Session ( *Annex 12* ) where many levels of children work independently with minimum supervision by choosing work according to their liking .So the teachers had to make a good number of graded worksheets and work cards and this new semi-structured free/open zone started in January 2007. The children work individually as well as in groups. Two teachers are constantly moving around to help whenever needed. There were several Indoor & Outdoor events such as Teachers day on 5 Sep ; Saraswati puja on 23rd Jan 2007 organized by the children ; and Children’s day on 14 Nov 2006 organized by the teachers . Children were taken to Rather mela on 28 June ; Theatre Dak Ghar on 26 July 2006 ; Poto para and Kalighat market visit on 24 Aug to get a historical perspective of the various professions ; Seagull Media & Arts Centre on 25 Aug ; Harek Rakam Ba education festival on 20 Nov -- all in 2006 ; and everyone went for a Picnic on 9 Feb 2007 .

### ***The Evening School ( in collaboration with DRCSC):***

At the end of two years it is found that 17 girls had attended the school for more than 170 days ; another 2 girls for ~ 50 days and 13 girls spent less than 25 days with us. The regular 17 have picked up Language , Maths , some science and social studies, health – hygiene , home nursing etc . They have also done a few local surveys and organized the data in charts and posters .All of them have learnt 12 different kinds of stitches in their Embroidery Class. They have also learnt to make jute based ornaments . Three of them were helped to get admitted in a govt Women’s Polytechnic to learn tailoring and doll making. 5 of these girls have started to work one hour to one and half hour everyday at home to do professional embroidery on the basis of job assignments given to them by Shikshamitra teacher Nandita. It turns out that for approx 30 hours of work these girls are able to earn about Rs.300-350 per month. Some of them have also started coming to Shikshamitra computer classes for which they pay from their own earnings.

### ***Computer Classes :***

After a long delay 5 computers were donated to us by Tata Consultancy Services ( TCS) in October 2006 and sixth one by another friend . After doing minor repairs and setting up the room , the

computer classes started from Jan 2007 with the help of Uddami , an NGO with experience in computer education. On 31<sup>st</sup> March there are 20 external students in two batches each undergoing 2 one hour classes per week. Our morning school children also have computer classes twice a week.

### ***All the Others who have helped***

The advisory body: Several meetings were held where some of the advisory body members were present. (I) 9-11 Dec 2006 (ii) 4 Feb 2007 (iii) 25 March 2007 . Advice was obtained one-to-one from some of the members as and when needed

Parents and the community: All teachers together made an extensive community visit on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2006. There were a total of 6 Parent's meetings . Four were held in the school on 26 April , 26 July , 26 Sep 2006 , and 7 Feb 2007. Similar meetings were held in the locality on 11 Aug and 20 Dec,2006. A 7th meeting was held in a new slum on 3 Sep 2006 after four aborted attempts to get new students.

Counselling : Two experts from Samikshani took 10 sessions with the children on compatibility , compassion , acceptance , getting along with each other.

The Eye Foundation : at Manicktala, Kolkata , like last year , carried out a check-up of 49 persons , mostly children and some parents on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2007 .

Misc Income & Donations: The school fees realized from all sections together was ~Rs.6000 ; miscellaneous cash donations from various friends amounted to Rs.18,250 ; various well wishers donated sketch pens , books , indoor games , candy packets amounting to around Rs.5400. Biggest donations were the 6 computers as stated above.

### ***The Education Resource Centre (ERC)***

Although the ERC was formally inaugurated on 20th May 2006 , we could not get the library into shape due to lack of staff . A few persons from organizations like Suchana ( of Santiniketan ) , NEEV and DRCSC have used the library, but more extensive use has not been possible.

Till November 2006 whatever temporary staff we had were completely involved with the festival and then they left. We got two persons to join the ERC in Feb 2007. In two months they have been able to (i) get all the 3 computers properly functional and networked (ii) give a final shape to the education festival report and send it to various persons and institutions (iii) organize the library and put 1300 books , reports etc into a data base (iv) catalogue all audio-visual materials in the library (v) start the telephone and address registers (vi) organize all photos of Shikshamitra and also initiate regular photo-documentation (vii) start organizing all the materials for the Shikshamitra website to be made soon (viii) design an e- newsletter of Shikshamitra which will be published regularly (ix) spend a fair amount of time looking at appropriate websites and downloading relevant documents .

### ***The next year ( 2007-08)***

1. Restructure the school routine to start a “earning-learning” class, building up on the art-craft skills students have acquired in the last year. Simultaneously start the process of integrating the teaching of language , maths , social studies , science with this “occupation” thus reviving the Gandhian Educational idea
2. Develop “another mainstream” Science curriculum and materials for children with the help of external consultant for those who are not “academically” inclined and are likely to leave formal academic school after Class VIII
3. Produce more Educational Materials for Children and Teachers , both fresh and translations into Bengali
4. Build up data base of the “Vocational Sector” after Class VIII/X ; build up appropriate networks and relations ; develop Shikshamitra as vocational guidance centre.
5. Develop a Shikshmitra website which will be of great help to educational practitioners.
6. Do appropriate publicity to ensure the use of Shikshamitra library by other schools and educators
7. Start interventions on Kolkata govt Bengali medium schools as well as other NGO schools asking for inputs

## LIST OF ANNEXES

1. The teachers and staff
2. Teaching – Learning Materials produced by us
3. Art & Craft
4. Practical Electricity
5. The Police and Shikshamitra
6. The use of films
7. Children write the history of Shikshamitra
8. What have the weakest achieved
9. The Final Exam 2005-06
10. Pradip becomes an agriculture apprentice
11. Children's committees and awards
12. Open Zone / Free Session

### Annex 1 : THE TEACHERS & STAFF on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007

Sl No	Name	Status
<b>Those who have left : old and new in 2006-07</b>		
1	Mahua Dutta	The first teacher of Shikshamitra had to quit due to critical family legal problems in early July. This was a big blow She was the Maths-Science –Ecology teacher and also librarian
2	Barun Sarkar	In charge of the ERC quit in early July as he could not cope up with the work
3	Atreyee Day	She was with us from beginning but left Kolkata for Pune in May 2006
4	Suchetana Banerjee	Dance teacher ; Dwindling interest of children made her redundant
5	Gopal Das	Gopal Das our clay teacher has left the locality. So we have also lost his daughter as our student .
6	Sujata Das	Joined as science-maths-ecology part time teacher in April. She could not adjust at all and quit early July
7	Nobina Nag	Joined as teacher in June . Was an extremely abrasive personality and mentally unbalanced and asked to leave within a fortnight.
8	Srabani Chakrabarty	Joined from May 2006 .In spite of her experience as teacher she could neither adjust with the children nor was able to grasp the ideology of the school . Sudeshna gave an enormous amount of time to her hoping to groom her but finally asked her to leave after October 2006 .
9	Samik Saha	Joined as science – maths teacher from August and was a near disaster with very poor teaching skills, class management and overall output. Asked to leave end September
10	Sukhendu Santra	Has been with us from the pre-project phase and has been a part timer as Life skill teacher and social worker . Has quit after Dec 31 2006 as he has got a full time with his other employer Sahay
11	Kishore Ghosh	an electrician by profession , and very popular local club secretary. He had already helped us quite often with community contacts and meetings. He joined as teacher taking one class on practical electricity per week from 20 <sup>th</sup> July 2006. The children have learnt what he had to teach and his role is over on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2007
12	Subha Das Mollik	An experienced school and college science teacher and film maker had joined as ERC head from July 2006 . Her main task was to coordinate an education festival and establish the ERC through that. All others at Shikshamitra had too many differences with her and she quit just after the festival in end November, 2006
13	Abheri Dey	Highly efficient ERC staff joined in September 2006 . But she left in end October 2006 having joined a full time course at a film institute. .
14	Malini Mukherjee	Joined in September 2006 . Highly experienced teacher , trainer , and versatile pedagogue. Meets all the requirements of Shikshamitra ,. But she had prior commitment to join another Education Resource Centre being set up by Science

		Communicators Forum and left at end March 2007 .
15	Basanti Das	Joined as teacher from 1 <sup>st</sup> December 2006. Had run a rural school for quite some time and seemed to have all the necessary experience. But was unable to cope with the kind of work required at Shikshamitra and was asked to leave at end March 2007
16.	Chandani Basu	Joined as part time Art teacher after Atreyee left from July 2006. Due to redesigning of the Shikshamitra curriculum , her services will not be necessary immediately from 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2007.
<b>Those who are with us : old and new by March 2007 ( FT = Full time ; PT = Part time )</b>		
1.	Sudeshna Sinha (FT)	Founder – Coordinator
2.	Biswjit Chitrakar (FT)	Although hired as caretaker, he is turning out to be a very enthusiastic teacher for small children. In a sense , he was forced into this role and has performed better than many of the more experience persons.
3.	Ankur Raychoudhury (PT)	He had joined as full timer last year , had become part timer. From October 2006 he has been full timer again , but from April 2007 will again become part timer as he will be doing a Ph.D.
4.	Nandita Ghosh (FT)	She has been there right from beginning teaching embroidery in evening class. Now she is taking care of health – life skills – crafts in morning school and supervising the evening computer school .
5.	Maura Hurley (PT)	She is coming twice a week compared to once last year and taking English and Craft classes.
6.	Mohan Chitrakar (PT)	In Gopal Das’s place we have got Mohan as the professional clay artisan taking one class per week
7.	Poonam Agarwal (PT)	Continues as our part time accountant
8.	Ruma Pal (FT)	Experienced Maths – Science teacher from Sudeshna’s previous Ashirvad school. Joined from 1 <sup>st</sup> December 2006.
9.	Manoj Sarkar (ERC)	Joined Feb 2007; 10 years experienced worker from NGO CINI –ASHA and is expected to lead the ERC
10.	Salen Bej (ERC)	Joined Feb 2007. Has worked in another NGO for several years and will assist Manoj

### Annex 2: Our TLM

1. A compilation for teaching English by taking suitable pieces and worksheets from various publications which the senior children are doing by themselves .
2. A story and activity book on “Water”
3. An activity book on “Health”
4. A book on the history of the children’s locality “Chetlar Kotha”
5. Lots of Worksheets , work cards , activities for Maths Geography , Bangla, Health , Environmental Studies
6. About 50 stories have been written by teachers ,resource persons, and students keeping in mind the need for small one page stories ; and a small book with some of the selected stories will be published soon.
7. A teacher’s handbook on language teaching “Bhashar Kotha” by resource person Sandip Bandopadhyay
8. Bengali spelling guide book for teachers also by Sandip
9. He is currently editing another language teaching book on „whole word“ approach written by staff Malini Mukherjee .

### Annex 3 : Art & Craft :

Report by Maura Hurley

#### **Top Ten from Activity Classes at Shikshamitra**

I started teaching craft classes at Shikshamitra about one year ago now. This first year has been a

mish-mash of projects to get the children interested in making things and trying their hand at different materials. There ended up being a focus on cloth, stitching and some drawing on paper, etc.

Preparation for these classes is essential. If you need to do cutting once you have reached the classroom you will end up wasting your precious student-teacher time together.

It may seem like common sense but in order for a class to go smoothly, all materials need to be carefully prepared by the facilitator beforehand. Of course, we don't always have time for this so you can enlist the children's help in some sort of orderly way.

I like to take the children through the activities step-by-step, sometimes explaining the steps all in the beginning and sometimes making it a surprise by bringing out new materials. One thing I try to make clear is that they cannot jump to the next step without finishing the step before that.

Though these are arts and crafts projects, the other aspect is that you can get children into a rhythm of working together and sharing materials. Pass materials out by choosing who is sitting most attentively and asking them to hand out the scissors, or other materials, to their classmates in the same way. Teach "take one and pass it on" for passing out sheets of paper, etc. Do not give materials out until everyone is looking up front and listening. Ask children to put shared materials back in the middle so that others can access it, "Use it and put it back" should be the motto in any art class. Waiting for your turn is an important lesson to be learned from these also, whether it is getting the attention of the teacher or using materials that someone else is already using.

Students should get help from the teacher if they step into the designated help space, not by constantly calling out "I can't do it" or "help me!" over and over. Also, they should know that interrupting when a student is being helped by a teacher is unacceptable. These "other" lessons take time, but students pick up on what you want if you stick to the same rules for each class and be persistent. Be kind and have lots of fun, but be sure there are some guidelines everyone understands so that everyone is able to enjoy the activity. All art is comes from the heart - there are no mistakes!

For more craft ideas, look at my kodomo-craft blog: <http://kodomocraft.blogspot.com>

- maura hurley

=====

## 1. Diary Covers

### **Prepare these materials:**

- Fabric (preferably a range of patterns so that children can choose their favorite; collect scraps from people)
- Scissors
- Fevicol glue (squeeze tubes are convenient for applying)
- Hard-cover notebook to be covered

Each child was given their own hard cover notebook and I explained that this book is for them to use in any way they choose, to keep drawings, writings, assignments, dreams, ideas, etc.

First, before putting out any materials, I demonstrated how a book should be covered and asked the children to watch closely. Cut fabric in a long piece, bigger than the notebook. Books should be covered just like covering school books by first folding over length-wise and gluing to be the exact height of the book; now tightly wrap this fitted cover around the front and back of the book and glue what hangs over to the inside flaps. Quite a bit of glue should be used to keep the cover on for a long time.

I didn't know if the children were in the habit of keeping diaries but I found out that they were very proud to have a special notebook they could fill up with their own ideas and creativity.

## **2. Art Switch Game: IT'S EVERYONE'S!**

Prepare these materials:

- Square sheets of paper that are cut exactly the same size

(your choice of size). Make a tiny mark to indicate the exact center point on each side

- A variety of markers, pastels, color pencils
- Collage items: stamps, candy wrappers, old envelopes, magazines, anything goes (bring in your junk collection)!
- Glue
- Scissors

You will need to prepare many sheets of paper that are exactly the same size; and a perfect square, your choice of size. Each edge needs to have a little marking to show the exact center.

Have children (also fun for adults though) sit in a circle with a variety of art supplies in the middle. First, each person needs to connect the top marking with the bottom marking using any sort of line they like. Then do a line to the two side marks as well.

They then began to "make their art" on the square. BUT, when the facilitator says, "SWITCH," every person has to pass "their" art square to the person sitting to their left. It continues on until (ideally) each person has "put their art upon" each square. IF there is time, the game can go on for several rounds around the circle.

Children should feel free to use the materials in the middle in any way they want, gluing on objects or words, making patterns and designs, writing poems, making cuts and weaving things through them - anything is OK.

At the end, the facilitator keeps all the squares and puts them together like a quilt, matching up the middle markings to make the lines all connect.

Finally, it is best to go over the black lines with a thick, durable black permanent marker to bring the whole piece together.

This is truly a group project and no square becomes any one person's. The project is the work of the entire group as every square has everyone's feeling and heart, and art, on it. This makes a great display for a classroom or as a centerpiece for an event.

### **3. Magazine Beads**

Prepare these materials:

- White glue mixed with a bit of water in a shallow pan
- A variety of markers, pastels, color pencils
- Toothpicks or matchsticks for rolling
- Narrow triangles of diamond shape magazine strips cut from magazines (various colors and patterns)
- String
- Needle

I came up with this activity because I remembered making these at our Camp Fire Girl meetings when I was a small girl! If you cut the magazine triangles fairly precisely, work carefully with the paste, and get your roll down well, these necklaces can really come out looking quite stunning.

Prepare:

The key to a successful bead is to cover the entire magazine strip, and start rolling at the wide end and --> to the point. Cover it all with glue again, and let your beads dry well somewhere safe before stringing. Ceiling fans worked to our advantage here if we kept the beads in a container with sides. This is a nice craft even for small hands; it is good for motor skills and coordination; and even if the outcome is a bit ratty-batty, the beads always look nice when the maker proudly wears his/her masterpiece. A string of even 8 beads looks really cute.

You can GOOGLE magazine beads for more precise instructions on how to prepare the paper, etc but I sort of played it by ear, as I always tend to do, and had good results.

### **4. Body Tracings**

Prepare these materials:

- Large pieces of casement cotton canvas or old sheets
- Pencil
- Fabric

We needed to make a back drop for an alternative school festival being held in Kolkata in November. We traced seven children's bodies with pencil onto big pieces of canvas, perfected the line with a

black paint outline and then had the children fill in the bodies with seven different bright colors. These were then cut out and stitched onto jute panels and hung behind the stage.

You can use big sheets of paper instead of fabric and big crayons for filling in and "clothing" the life-size paper dolls.

A friend who saw these tracings had the wonderful idea of doing this to various family members who come for what they called a "sister fest." They plan to do the tracings on old sheets and then drape them around the backyard. People could even take home a sister this way!

One time I did these on big sheets of paper with my own children, colored them in with clothing their grandmother had sent them, folded them up and posted them. She hung them on her wall at home and said, "I really feel their presence!"

The children at Shikshamitra loved getting into different silly jumping, dancing, throwing poses on the canvas; and loved even more painting the big spaces inside the black lines.

## **5. New Year Collages**

Prepare these materials:

- Paper
- Oil pastels
- Magazines for cutting colors and words/pictures

A collage is a lot like a new year just begun...you have a blank sheet of paper in front of you and have no idea how the layers of color, pictures and textures are going to have their influence in creating the final piece of artwork. As the kids worked on their collages, they thought about what they want to do, how they want to feel, who they want to meet, and what they'd like to learn in the coming year!

Give out a blank sheet of paper.

1) Put the oil pastels in the middle of the table and tell the kids to think about all the different feelings and emotions inside of them. They should try to cover the entire sheet of paper with color and patterning in oil pastels only.

2) The next layer is also about color: place a bunch of magazines in the middle and have the children look for bits of color only, not words or pictures. They can add deeper color to what they have already put on their page, by matching or contrasting. They should think about their relationships with friends, teachers, family members, etc. while doing this.

3) The last layer is about EXPERIENCE: now the children can cut out little pictures and words that appeal to them and glue them onto their collage. Ask them about what they want to do this year?

What they want to learn at school? Where do they want to go?

Note: playing music in the background can help keep them focused while doing the project. Turn it down when you want to explain the next step.

If you like, add your name cut out at the end!

## **6. Repairing our SCHOOL Mats**

Prepare these materials:

PART I

- Off-white casement-type cotton canvas
- Fabric paints, paintbrushes, palettes, water tubs, rags

PART TWO:

- Patchwork fabric squares (9 for each child) cut in perfect squares ahead of time
- Needle, thread, scissors
- Fabric for side piping

All the children at the school have a mat to sit on during classes. These are called asan. Seeing how beat up they had become, I decided that the children could repair them and personalize them. This became a month-long project in two parts (for each side of the mat and the bias along the side) with very nice results: the mats have truly brightened up our classrooms!

We made two different sides for the mats. The first was just simple casing canvas fabric that the children did their own design upon and signed it with their name. We had a visitor from Japan that day so some of the children got help from her and have cute characters on their mats. The children, by now, have become quite dexterous with the fabric paints and know how to use them well.

For the second side, the children learned how to layout a design using 9 pieces of fabric (squares) that were pre-cut and put out for them to choose. They stitched these together to make a small crazy quilt



that became the back side. Lastly, fabric for piping was added to finish it off. It was a long process but the kids persevered and all enjoy their mats now.

## 7. Draw Half

Prepare these materials:

- Various clear photographs from magazines (b x w are good; larger size is helpful)
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Paper to glue onto
- Drawing pencils; Colored pencils
- Drawing pencils

Children choose a photo that interests them and cut it in half, either lengthwise or across the middle sideways. Younger students needed some help deciding where to make their cut. The student then glued one piece on the page, leaving enough space beside it to try drawing in the other half. Students penciled in the other half first and then applied color.

*This exercise can be a good introduction to shading and lighting practice in drawing. It also teaches children how to match colors as best as they can and blend colors together (i.e. brown and red in the back wall of the surfboard).*

## 8. Baking Cakes

**Prepare these materials:**

- Flour, baking powder, butter, sugar, eggs, vanilla, banana, nuts, cocoa (other ingredients you want to add)
- Mixing bowls, large spoons for mixing, spatula for scraping the bowl, measuring spoons, measuring cups
- Baking pans, oven mitts
- Aprons
- Oven

We made our cakes using the following basic cake recipe and then added some of our own touches. There were three classes: one made a plain banana cake with walnuts, one made a plain chocolate cake, and one made a banana-chocolate cake. All three came out perfect!

**BASIC CAKE RECIPE**

DRY BOWL: Sift together these

1- 3/4 cup Flour

Pinch of Salt

2 tsp. Baking powder

WET BOWL: Mix well

3/4 cup Butter, melted

3/4 cup Sugar

2 eggs, beaten well

1 tsp. Vanilla

1/2 cup Milk, as and if needed

Possible Cake Variations:

To this recipe, add 2-3 mashed bananas in the wet bowl.

To this recipe, add 1-2 Tbsp cocoa to the dry bowl

Add nuts or cinnamon if you like

The children did all the measuring, cracking eggs and preparing the pans too.

They were also in charge of clean-up, which should always be considered as part of the food preparation itself!

*Unfortunately, I have no photos of this fun day - this was one of the very best classes, and probably most rewarding for the kids as they all got to taste the cake afterward with the teachers. We made two cakes and a pan of cupcakes.*

## 9. Design your own holiday clothes

Prepare these materials:

- White variety of crayons, color pencils and/or markers

- Photocopied clothing outlines for some boys and girls fashions

It was festival time in the city - the end of the year. Some children were thinking about the Durga Puja celebration, some were thinking about Eid and some were thinking of Christmas. Everyone knew they wanted to dress up to celebrate.

Designing clothing is someone's job! This idea surprised the children and they liked the idea of trying their hand at this profession.

I prepared some photocopies of simple clothing: a frock, jeans, a t-shirt, a panjabi, a sleeveless kurta. Each child got to choose two sheets. When they finished they tried making sentences in English, "I want to wear a \_\_\_\_"

#### **10. Papier Mache: Puppets and banks**

Prepare these materials:

- Big balloons
- A huge, messy load of small strips of newspaper
- Flour and water
- Low mixing pans

Blow up balloons, and begin to cover by placing newspaper strips in the drippy glue made by mixing flour and water in a low dish, so that it is still pretty watery. Children should be instructed on dipping strips and wiping off the excess between their fingers. The entire balloon should get covered with at least two layers of the newspaper (but three makes the pieces much sturdier). The kids had trouble doing layers; they wanted to be finished when they couldn't see the balloon anymore.

These were then hung up to dry on a line with clothespins.

The following class we took them down and burst the balloons inside if they were still full of air. We cut the small hole where the balloon lip was hanging out into a larger hole and some children made banks while others turned theirs into hand puppets (as you can see from the photo.)

To make the base for the bank, use a toilet paper roll tightly taped to a cardboard base. Make a slit somewhere in the round papier mache mold as well so that coins can be dropped inside.

To make the puppets, wrap a long cloth at the base so that your hand can fit under. Try reversible puppets for sad and happy, girl and boy, etc!

We painted these using fabricryl paint.

#### **Some other projects we have done:**

- Making paper dolls and dressing them up
- Sent booklets with pages about ourselves to friends in Germany
- Fabric painting patches and stitching into them to put on bags
- Stitching designs on paper
- Making stamps with string designs glued onto cardboard for printing wrapping paper and envelopes
- Stitching a welcome sign for our school
- Genki English ([www.genkienglish.com](http://www.genkienglish.com)) active songs in English
- Rosalie Gioffiniello's TIBET class using props from Tibet

#### **Annex 4 : Practical Electricity**

This was taken by local club secretary Kishor Ghosh who is also a professional electrician between 27 July 06 – 7<sup>th</sup> Jan 07. He taught the following : types of wires and currents ; how to connect wires ; about Negative & Positive terminals ; how to know – wire / bulb is defective ; how much voltage is required to light a bulb of low wattage and a tube light ; different parts of a tube light ;function of regulator and how it works; make connection between switch board, bulb, tube light, fan and regulator; parallel & series connection ; draw a diagram of extension cord and make use of it.

#### **Annex 5 : The Police and Shikshamitra**

During a festival in Feb 2007 called Shivratri , the police and the slum dwellers (from which most of the Shikshamitra students come) had a fight . From the next day the police started coming every night to arrest people somewhat arbitrarily and harass the families. Some of the older boys left the locality and many students stopped coming to school because of all this tension. Some mothers approached us to allow their sons to spend the night at Shikshamitra to avoid being arrested. This led to a lot of arguments amongst the teachers , about the risks of drawing the police to the school , the possible trouble with the landlord etc. But finally on 26<sup>th</sup> Feb 2007 we decided to arrange night shelter for 5

boys . They spent the nights till 1<sup>st</sup> March with 2 teachers also staying with them. Later on when things became normal and all children started coming to school , the senior children were asked to describe the trouble with the police as they saw it and then also to make a descriptive chart with a picture in the middle. The children initially wanted to put all the blame on the police , but the process of making the written chart made them reflect and they reached the conclusion that some of the slum people were also responsible and did a lot of provocative things. Another outcome of this episode is that now all the children want to spend a night at Shikshamitra because the few who stayed had such a good time and it was like an adventure for them !

#### **Annex 6: Use of films :**

This year watching of films was carefully integrated with the Language – Communication class. The Bengali class had the concept of king and Satyajit Ray’s “Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne” was shown to discuss the idea and kinds of “kings”. Different excerpts were shown from Hindi films and children were asked to observe and write comments about the plot , the shifting positions of the various persons etc. A series of films made by children from all over the world was also shown during the period July-Sep 2006. Some of the Picture Films made by DSH of Lukhnow were also used for teaching English , but this wasn’t given a fair trial .

#### **Annex 7 : Children write the history of Shikshamitra**

Our idea of teaching history right from the beginning has been not to burden the child with huge amounts of information as is done in all curricula in India and also to de-emphasize history as an exclusive subject but think it as part of integrated social studies. Our idea is to give the child a sense that it is not just the story of the past but it is a continuum and we can also look into the future ; secondly the issue that the collection of evidences and drawing of conclusions is often colored by the perceptions of the collector ; and finally always think about cause and effect. With the senior batch of 5 children it was decided in 2007 to have a one month project of writing the history of Shikshamitra culminating into the final exam in March 2007. The children decided what methods they are going to use to collect information and write : interviewing students , teachers who were there right from the beginning ; interviewing Swanirvar people since Swanirvar is the parent body; looking into old exercise books ; collecting stories ; writing stories ; make timeline ; collecting materials ; looking at photographs etc. Each person had a specific assignment and they would get together regularly to present their findings and help and criticize each other. Finally after a month they made everything into 4 chart papers with questions , stories , pictures , time line , interviews etc. What is exciting is that the children did it themselves.

The final oral exam was both individual and group exercise. Sudeshna asked what was different about this “exam” Shajahan said that they have learnt and shown “how history is created” in a miniature form. Others got the cue . Pradip said that “we became historians and found out many things which were not there in our original questionnaire. We also learnt what our teachers had thought while starting the school.” Annu said that “evidence did not remain as some bits of information only ; we actually used them to write our history” . Mohan’s comment was “our history exam was not just a one day event but we spent a month collecting history” . Biki said that “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 if a conventional history teacher comes and says that you do not know anything about the “larger” history given in the books and what is the point of knowing a small school’s history ? . The children countered : a) Normal history books only have loads of information ; there is no scope to verify or engage with that text b) We now know how to ask questions and not rely on the opinion of one author only and also to form our own opinion c) what we learnt that history is a continuum and we came right upto the present and also got some hints about the future d) we created our own knowledge and can do it again in different circumstances.

Final question was why had each child chosen a particular method or tool. It turned out that children chose from their own strength – weaknesses and likings . Shajahan likes to write stories; Pradip has writing problems so he chose to deal 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. .

For us this was a very exciting moment of our last two year’s effort to teach social studies and communications differently. .

### **Annex 8 : What have the weakest achieved ?**

Sujata Bor joined Shikshamitra in June 2006. She was a slow learner and was extremely scared and would jump up with fright every time she was called. We learnt that she was regularly beaten up in her previous school; her parents treated her like dirt making her do all the physical work at home, not giving her proper clothes etc. Initially she refused to participate in any physical or group activity, never smiled, and hardly ever spoke. After 8 months she has started writing and many of her writings have something to do with abuse of girls. Today she has started performing in various classes. In November her mother came to us to complain that whereas she used to do everything without asking any questions, but now she often wants to know the reason for things. And one day Sujata refused to take away her father's dirty plate telling her father that in Shikshamitra everyone does their own such errands!

Hasna joined Shikshamitra in May 2006. She grew up under very strict family norms which forbade her to play or sing or dance. Interestingly she has one of the most caring father out of all the children studying in Shikshamitra and this poor rikshaw puller delivers a hot mid day meal to his daughter every day in the school. Hasna and Sujata were the only two children who did not participate in any of the performances on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2006 teachers day. But today Hasna is the best in computers and she surprised the whole school by doing the best recitation for her final Bengali exam in March 2007!

### **Annex 9: The Final Exam for 2006-07**

In this 2<sup>nd</sup> final exam of March 2007 we repeated some of the forms which we had used in the first exam in March 2006. But this time each teacher had a discussion with children as to what they would like to be tested on, when, for how long and the final shape of the exam was based on these discussions. Some of the interesting samples are:

- In Language exam for the middle group a painting by Goya was put up and the children had to answer various questions related to this painting
- A song on storm sung by Nachiketa and written by Sumon was played and the children were given a worksheet where they had to answer language related questions followed by verbal discussions. Then they had to put their feelings and impressions on clay.
- In the senior group each student had to recite the same poem from Sukumar Ray's "Abol Tabol" with action and dress to go with it. Many put up excellent performance
- Each senior student was engaged in a verbal duel with their teacher regarding Nandigram and arguments for and against industrial drive
- Portions of Modern Times film was shown followed by questions and discussions
- The History exam was the culmination of the month long project (see annex 7 above) of writing the history of Shikshamitra.
- For Health, the exam was a mixed group skit performance where they had to enact an emergency, demonstrate the first aid used, and justify their actions.
- The graded question papers for Maths and EVS were very attractive to look as well as do. The children are doing similar worksheets all the time in their class and in the Open sessions. The teacher concerned has collected the best material and ideas from all possible sources in India and abroad.
- For Pradip, who is dyslexic, there was a special exam based on his village apprenticeship experience (see annex 10 below)
- In Geography the exam was a kind of revision of the whole school project done on states of India which had culminated in a booklet being produced by a group of children on each state. In the exam each child got a booklet of which he/she was not an author and then they had to match various picture cues given to go with that state, along with various other questions based on the booklet.

### **Annex 10: Pradip Mondol becomes an agriculture apprentice**

In September 2005 when the school students had gone to study trees and collect leaves in a local park, the teacher found the vagabond boy Pradip who turned out to have an excellent knowledge of the

local vegetation. On our invitation he joined the school. But although at 16 years age he was the oldest, it was very clear that because of dyslexia his reading and writing skills were very poor, and he was also not very articulate. On the other hand he was a good organizer and quite dependable and responsible. In spite of his problems he developed some reading and writing abilities. To us it was clear that he would not last much longer in the school unless we made some specific arrangements as per his aptitude. So in January 2007, after discussing with him and his parents, he was taken to Bajitpur in N.24 Parganas, one of the project villages of Swanirvar, and placed as apprentice with agriculture worker Narayan Bachhar for a month. He learnt how to make a tree nursery, how to prepare the soil, mulching, vegetable bed, vermi compost, botanical pest controllers. He also picked up a lot of knowledge about various species of vegetables, trees, cultivation practices etc. Initially he had a tough time getting up very early in the morning and doing such hard physical labour in the field. But in a week he adjusted to it and enjoyed it thoroughly. He became quite popular with the family and the neighbourhood where he was staying. When he returned we found that he had become more confident; his mother said that he has now better food habits. And his message to his fellow students was the appreciation for hard village work under much more trying conditions compared to cities. Pradip took the initiative in the parent's meeting to say that he and some of the seniors are going to make regular visits to the houses of those children who are irregular and late. He has been doing it since mid February with marked improvement in school attendance. Pradip now wants to go to the village for a second stint.

#### **Annex 11 : Children's committees and awards**

:Children have 4 committees for cleaning, water, garbage, maintenance. From August 2006 we started a monthly review system to assess each child's performance in these committees and a card is given to good performers. This card can be exchanged by the children for some food from a particular shop. The bi monthly awards for various other qualities like attendance, punctuality, co-operation, perseverance, admitting one's mistakes, concentration, co-operation, personal hygiene, etc are also continuing.

#### **Annex 12 : The Open Zone/ Free Session**

Sudeshna during her trip to Germany in summer 2006 was much impressed by seeing "Frei Arbeit" in schools there. We decided to start something of that nature. The main idea is that many levels of children will learn to work independently with minimum supervision by choosing work according to their liking. We had started this in October 2006 where it was left totally upto the children to do what they want. But this turned out to be not very conducive to learning. So the teachers then made a large number of graded work (worksheets and work cards) and this new semi-structured free/open zone started in January 2007. The main things the children do is Bengali, Maths and Problem Solving. The children work individually as well as in groups as decided by the teachers. Two teachers are constantly moving around to help whenever needed. We have observed that some children are excellent self learners. On the other hand some others have turned out to be uncomfortable in this free zone and keep calling the teachers constantly. Some of the older children also act as facilitators. This has also allowed each child to go at his/her own pace. While one child may do only one task, another might finish off six worksheets. In this free zone there has also been work related to music – painting – craft. One of the big boons is that it has allowed free time to the teachers to read, think, plan, discuss. This has also forced and enabled the teachers to make a large number of graded and interesting materials. We think now we can organize such free zones for larger classes also.

# **SHIKSHAMITRA**

## **Open Learning Centre - An Alternative Secondary School and Education Resource Centre (ERC)**

a project of SWANIRVAR

### **Annual Report ( April 2007 – March 2008)**

**Overall our vision remains that the single rigid school curriculum from Class III and more so from Class VI onwards is totally unsuited for India and the future. Various attempts to “deliver” this curriculum better and better have very limited utility and can backfire very badly. It can result in producing 10 times more highly inappropriately educated school pass youths. Shikshamitra’s major goal remains developing a more diversified secondary curriculum and also to redefine what a school should look like and what it should be doing. Although we are struggling now to convince anyone, we are absolutely sure that the current school system will very soon show more and more signs of collapsing. Our contention is that we have to continue to experiment with the alternatives and within three years there will be substantial number of takers for our ideas, materials, and methods.**

In this 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the project (April 2007 till Jan 2008) we have, for the first time, conducted an intensive 3 month “creative writing” training for children of another NGO; given training to govt. primary school teachers in Swanirvar’s rural project area in North 24 Parganas district on language - learning disabilities - remedial teaching and made follow-up visits to these primary schools as well as secondary schools where Swanirvar works; carried out orientation of teachers and students in two private schools in Kolkata and Purulia district. The first book of short stories written and illustrated by our students has been published; a lot of reading materials for children and by children is being created; some work has been done by a volunteer on audiovisuals for teaching English; an alternative science curriculum was drawn up with a consultant; several booklets and other materials have been made for teachers. We hired a person who made and verified a database on vocational education in West Bengal. Although our student strength has not increased, we are conducting highly interesting “learn and earn” classes and the products made by students have been sold at exhibitions; the children have visited several other vocational centres; a weekly cooking class is providing another sort of learning; the effective use of audiovisuals is also increasing. In April 2007 we hired several teachers hoping to start interventions in govt high schools of Kolkata and carried out intense dialogue. But it fizzled out and we had to let go of four teachers in the end of October 2007. From November 2007, we re-organized the school and the children are doing most of their work together instead of separate classes with lots of self learning via lessons – materials made in advance. We have completed a one year computer course in the evening for children who go to local govt high schools as well as some girls of our previous evening school. Our morning school children are doing regular computer classes. Recently we had three volunteers who have built up a profile of ~30 other resource education NGOs of Kolkata by visiting and collecting information and we are starting regular contact with them.

It is clear that Shikshamitra’s own student strength will not increase in 2008-09. But through our work with this limited number of children we are creating materials, lessons, modules, ideas which we are ready to spread. Among these the use of audiovisuals will get a special push in 2008-09. Several other NGOs and funding agencies have approached us for inputs and many govt. primary and secondary schools in Swanirvar rural project are ready for them. In 2008-09 our “outreach & indirect” students are going to increase substantially. We shall carry forward the networking within Kolkata with all other education actors and together work out various collaborations, including greater dialogue with the State. Networking with organizations all over India and obtaining useful materials from them will also increase. As a prelude this year we have already checked out and written a small “review” of around 50 education websites. By beginning of 2009 we hope to start a “vocational counselling and guidance centre”. Recently we were asked to give talk at Jadavpur University and at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences. We hope to start concrete “study-research” collaborations with academic institutions. Finally many of our students are ready to start some work in their community.

## Index and Highlights , 2007-08

<b>I</b>	<b>The Students : 20-30 in fulltime day school ; if we include the afternoon and evening sections we had a total of ~ 70 students in 2007-08</b>
<b>II</b>	<b>Teachers &amp; Staff : Situation unsteady as before</b>
<b>III</b>	<b>Language Communication : Our Strongest Area</b>
<b>IV</b>	<b>The Learn – Earn Class : Our new Gandhian experiment in today’s urban context</b>
<b>V</b>	<b>New Classroom Arrangement : Creating Motivated –Independent-Cooperative Learners</b>
<b>VI</b>	<b>The Cooking Class : Experiment with Integrated learning ; integrating various subjects and also integrating the working with hands with studying</b>
<b>VII</b>	<b>Our Successful Students and our Limitations : 4 case studies</b>
<b>VIII</b>	<b>Production of relevant &amp; innovative Teaching Learning Materials : We are ready to share these with others</b>
<b>IX</b>	<b>Input to Others : Shikshamitra gave inputs to 4 Swanirvar rural primary schools; 12 govt primary schools ; 2 formal high schools ; 2 NGO education efforts</b>
<b>X</b>	<b>Materials for Teachers and Other Adults : Quite a few ready to distribute</b>
<b>XI</b>	<b>Vocational : A database in reasonable shape</b>
<b>XII</b>	<b>Other Developments and News</b>

**I. Students** : 10 new children joined our regular morning school in April,2007 from a new area ( Portland Park ). Attendance peaked at 32 for about three months till Sep '07 . Some more joined , some left at various points , some were asked to leave . Over the year we catered to 35 students and we ended the year with 21 students. Five girls of our previous evening school “re-joined” to participate in the new “Learn-Earn” class . About 30 students have attended the evening computer classes in several batches. So overall the total number of direct students has been around 70. But this year we started giving inputs to 4 Swanirvar rural schools , 12 govt schools of Swanirvar rural area , and several NGO schools in Kolkata and elsewhere . So indirectly we have started catering to a much larger number of students and positioning ourselves as a Resource Centre as was our original mission.

**II. Teachers** : Three new teachers were hired in April'07. Between April'07-Oct'07 we had 6 full-timers and 4 part time teachers and two ERC staff . But our interventions in govt schools of Kolkata did not materialize. We relieved 4 teachers on 31<sup>st</sup> Oct . Between Nov'07 – March'08 we had only 3 full time teachers ( *Sudeshna , Ankur , Biswajit* ) , 2 part timers ( *Maura , Nandita* ) , and 2 ERC staff ( *Malasree , Manoj* ) . But this is also the period when our outside interventions, production of materials increased thus putting a lot of pressure on all the staff .

### **III. Language Communications**

Our major effort has been to redefine the whole teaching and learning of Languages and impart “total” communication skills to each child building upon their strengths. Apart from simple reading and writing skills , we would like each child to think critically on their own and express it in various ways. So far we have concentrated on writing through simple paragraphs, stories, reviews, comments, interviews, categorizations, drawings, paintings , charts, Venn grams etc. An array of modes are used to stimulate all learners in various ways. Teaching is intensely dialogical ; there are listening and written comprehension exercises; there is a huge emphasis on the listening , making , writing, and illustrating of stories. Pictures (their own, story books, prints), songs, poetry, films are used as pedagogic tools and there are carefully designed worksheets to go with any such activity. All this has already resulted in massive creative output by the students. A collection of their writings has been published with their own illustrations . Another will soon come out. The school is full of their paintings . All the writings in Bengali and English and all the drawings for a highly popular calendar on child labour for 2008 was done by our students. They have transformed the walls of their teacher’s house through their paintings . In the big Children’s fair in St.Xaviers of Kolkata in Jan'08 , the students bagged 6 out of the 9 art prizes. The most important effect of our teaching method has been the confidence and boldness with which even those children ,who were previously labelled as weakest, bottom of the class, un-teachable, can now draw, paint and write .

We wanted to try out our methods with other children and this year we got this opportunity when another NGO Development Action Society ( DAS) running non formal teaching centres in very poor Bantala suburb of Kolkata wanted us to conduct a „Creative Writing“ course for their future child peer

leaders. This enabled us to collect and organize two years of Shikshamitra experience and conduct 24 two hour classes between Aug-Nov'07 for 13 adolescents . The final presentation on 12th Dec'07 comprised of a display of the student's "work". There was an animated rendering of a theatre song followed by impromptu chart making (based on the song) in groups. Students explained different exercises done during the session. The book "Amader Lekha" was specially brought out for the occasion. It comprised of the best writings of all the students . Each of them got a copy . Finally each one read out her writing from the book..

For us the additional bonus was that we now have a „Manual for conducting a Creative Writing Course“

#### **IV. The Learn and Earn Class**

One of our objectives was to try out the Gandhian concept of learning a craft /trade , producing products of saleable quality , earn an income , and learn many subjects through that craft/trade. We started with cloth based production on 10 April twice a week for 2.5 hours. The whole morning school joined and were divided into two groups ---- Learners and Advanced . Five girls of the previous evening school come for "finishing" the products twice a month .In the meantime translation of the chapters "Story of a Shirt" from NCERT and "History of Textile Industry in India " from Eklavya text books were done. And gradually we attempted to teach the social studies and science and maths around the theme of textiles in the regular "academic " classes. This first experiment was over in August and in one sense we were reasonably pleased with the overall output and integration of hands and brain work.

But on the other hand we also discovered that many children were reluctant to do the same design more than once , do careful finishing so necessary for any "production". They were refusing to submit themselves to the "discipline" of a particular task. So the class was often quite difficult to manage , easily disrupted, and often turning out to be an irritating and tense experience, rather than a joyful learning one , for students and teachers . But for various reasons this discipline problem disappeared after October and things were much better .

The second theme we picked up from October was "Paper" . Along with this a special class on book binding was carried out .

Four visits were made by advanced children to other vocational centres : (i) Karmakutir on 31 July'07 (ii) Silence on 20 Sep'07 (iii) Academy of Fine Arts to see "kantha" stitch (iv) A visit to Baithak-khana bazaar by the students who are learning Book-binding on 11<sup>th</sup> Jan'08 to know how to procure quality material

The children have learnt and have produced the following : School bags , coasters , cloth patches which can be stitched on to various items; book marks , cards , paper bags , envelopes, wrapping paper , book binding , macramé products from thread, banners , friendship bracelets , clay jewellery ( started recently)

Some of the products were sold in two fairs in Dec'07 in Calcutta International School and Calcutta International Women's Club where the children also had the experience of selling the products , keeping accounts, and getting an idea of what kind of products other people are buying and making. Some of the children are involved in binding Shikshamitra library books ; some are also taking up some book binding work from their locality and earning some money.

#### **V. New Classroom arrangement**

From the beginning ( 2005) we have divided the children into three "Groups" approximating their abilities and not age . Whenever necessary we allowed switchovers between groups. We also continuously experimented with the school routine. Although various "subjects" were taught , our emphasis was on breaking the barriers. So there has been tremendous amount of mixing up of the teaching of Language, Science , Environment , Maths , Social Studies , Art , Craft , Music, Theatre , Film , Library classes. Intensive dialogue in classroom ; insisting on original & independent thinking- writing-drawing and not "copying" ;going outside the school to investigate ; working in groups; pushing students towards self learning --- these were some of the features which we were trying to incorporate. It was very difficult for many students , but even more for teachers . Most of the children who stuck with us for at least six months caught the essence and what we were trying , started enjoying, and also their learning curve showed a sharp rise.

But running three separate classes, incorporating so many "non-traditional" subjects in the regular school routine, dealing with inattentive violence prone slum children , handling "difficult children" ; doing all these intensive experiments required **quite a few** sharp teachers who were willing to "unlearn and learn". That has been our biggest problem and sometimes a near disaster.

In Nov 2007 we decided to let go of half the teachers and reorient the school. Between Nov'07 and March'08 there were 3 full time and 3 part time teachers and 22 students



- There are no separate classes. Most of the time all 22 students are in one room with one teacher as facilitator. Other teachers get to spend quality time making and designing materials and courses.
- For computer classes children have been divided into two groups. There are also special “remedial” classes for those who need them. There are some separate periods for the older advanced group.
- The periods are of variable length (50 min to 4 hours) depending upon whether it is Problem Solving, Story, Issues, Independent Zone, Art-Craft, Film, Cooking.
- In most classes children are working independently using books and worksheets.
- There is a lot of group work, mutual help and cooperation. Older children help out younger ones in language, maths. Often in solving puzzles it is the other way around where younger children help out the older ones.

Although this has been going on for only 3 months, we feel that children have become even better “motivated –independent-cooperative” learners. The differently talented children are getting more scope to develop themselves; and the teachers are getting more time to read – learn – develop ideas and materials. This is quite important as one of our mandate is also to give inputs to other schools. But we have felt that for English and Maths we require more homogenous groups or a conventional class division for a certain time each day.

### **VI. The Cooking Class**

Cooking started as a fortnightly class in August and from November it has become a weekly event every Monday. This class involves measurement, accounts, marketing, history, geography, nutrition, science. Gender roles are challenged. Boys who do not help with household chores expect girls to do things for them. Many girls are even ready to please them. Cooking class often disappoints both, helping them to re-define their roles. Every Monday we have a sumptuous dish shared by all the students and staff together. Some of the dishes have been: Alu –Bharta, Vegetable fried rice, Roti with vegetable tarka, tomato soup and chicken pie, upama, dosa, jhal muri.

With mixed vegetable class they learnt about root vegetables, tap roots and their functions. On jhal muri day they learnt the basic facts about legumes which were used – chana, peanut, sprouted mung etc. With the dosa making class there was „science“ class on fermentation, explaining and making curd, watching the rising of dosa batter, learning about the use of yeast for making bread, good and bad bacteria, principles of pressure cooker, and appropriate worksheets to go with all this. Alu Bharta class was accompanied with the study of the history and geography of the spread of potato starting from Peru, going to Europe, its introduction in India by the Portugese. Fried rice class had a similar story for rice. Teachers and students learnt that the origin of rice was in Tamil Nadu, the Tamil name is arisi, and that gradually changed in mid-east, Germany, England and finally became rice in English language. There were numerous other classes and activities like eco cycle surrounding rice, comparative study between rice and wheat, English names of various ingredients and modes of cooking and writing recipes in English etc.

It was decided to have a cooking annual exam in March 2008. Children discussed the difference between govt school mid day meal and the cooking class. They talked about different forms of cooking and what items have been cooked by each method. An item was selected: ruti – ghoogni – soyabean. The children were divided into four groups with leaders and each group had to do shopping, making bills, accounts, preparing the cooking utensils, cleaning, cutting, rolling of chapatis, cooking the vegetable, frying the chapatis, table decoration, serving, eating without wasting, cleaning, washing of napkins and utensils. Three mothers came as “judges” and were totally taken aback at the energy and organization. Mohan’s mother jokingly asked Mohan to cook the family dinner for the day!

We feel that this has turned out to be one of the most exciting integrated learning activities in the school.

### **VII. Our Successful students and our limitations**

Case Study 1 : Shajahan Ali Kaji, 15 and Biki Sardar, 14

Shajahan is one of the most independent and intelligent child we have. A dropout after Class IV of a corporation school, he was asked by his father to join Shikshamitra. The family has a shop for selling scraps and his main interest is in “running“ this shop and in 2005,2006 he would bunk school to work there. But by early 2007 he became quite serious about academics and got quite interested in the whole education process of Shikshamitra, specially the aspect of independent learning. He is a fast learner and doer and previously would complete whatever task he has given with minimum possible effort and then forget the school. But now he is eager to learn as much as possible. The senior batch of Shikshamitra,

for various reasons, has recently dwindled to only four children. Two of them, Shajahan and Biki, can potentially finish secondary schooling. Given the uncertain situation of Shikshamitra we recently offered to get these two admitted to the good local govt school (Chetla Boys). Both refused saying that formal secondary school involves only memorising, and not any understanding or thinking. Shajahan has also said that he does not need a “degree” and is fully capable of earning his livelihood without one. And in Shikshamitra he will have the scope of learning his chosen subjects at a pace and depth he wants to. He is also the chess champion of his locality. He has requested us to provide him training in repairs of electronic equipments. Unfortunately most formal vocational centres want a Class X degree. Biki and Shajahan are ready to prepare for Open School exam. Biki wants to learn and earn at the same time and has the total support of his family and in that sense he is the ideal Shikshamitra student. And it is for this very reason that they are branded as “fools” by the locality for sticking it out in Shikshamitra as Biki is regarded as “intelligent”! Biki has recently started to come in the afternoon and started reading the Class VIII govt English and Bengali books; and doing sums from Class VII Maths book.

Recently Shajahan (to some extent Biki, Mohan, Shantanu) has raised the issue of the future of the school stating strongly that Shikshamitra should never become like a formal govt school and instead should definitely preserve its “open” character. Otherwise where would people like him go?

#### Case Study 2 : Hasna Banu,15

She is the daughter of a rag picker mother and rikshaw van puller father. In the village her father’s brothers are teachers. But Hasna’s father did not study in school and being quite poor, could barely manage in the village. So they decided to move to Kolkata. Hasna went to a private school and when she joined us in May 2006 she could barely write some words. And she was quite rigid about what Muslim girls are supposed to do and not do. So she spoke very little, would not participate in any singing – dancing, would not draw, not talk to boys, and talk very carefully with other girls. In Sep-Oct 2006 the theatre rehearsals for the festival Harek Rakam Ba broke down her isolation. She opened up, started mixing, and gained tremendous confidence. She started off in the junior most Bengali class I (at age 14). By January 2007 she was shifted to the middle group Class IV. Now she is doing well in everything. In July her father came and said that there was a boy in the locality who had an eye on her and it was very unsafe and they packed her off to the village. But the village school wouldn’t take her and so she was back. While Hasna is very sure and thrilled by the progress she has made, her mother was not happy at all. She was constantly comparing Hasna’s reading skills with good students of Class VII-VIII of the locality (same age as Hasna) and saying that Hasna hasn’t learnt anything. Repeated explaining by us that she started off at Class I level last year did seem to satisfy the mother and an uncle. It was proving very difficult to handle a perpetually dissatisfied mother who wants her daughter to be a “good” Muslim woman and also excel at “modern” education at the same time. Although the father was very supportive, we did not know how long we would have Hasna with us as the parents keep on quarrelling violently on this issue. In the 14<sup>th</sup> march parent’s meeting Hasna’s mother admitted in front of everyone that the previous day Hasna went to the bank with her to write the cheque and withdraw money refusing the help of the manager. Previously for this task Hasna’s mother used to pay a fee of Rs.10 to others. Hasna also challenged her uncle in reading skills and the uncle has admitted that Hasna can now read both Bengali and English better than him. In the recently concluded exam in March 2008, she was one of the best performers in the school.

#### Case Study 3 : Pradip Mondol, 18

Pradip was our oldest student. He is dyslexic and has very limited reading – writing skills. In mid 2005 when the school children had gone to a local ground to study trees and leaves, they met the vagabond Pradip who it turned out had a lot of knowledge and interest in plants and he started coming to school. We tried to give him as much 3R skills as possible till Dec 2006. In Jan 2007 we sent him as an apprentice to Swanirvar rural project with a very good farmer-trainer for a month and half. Pradip came back quite enthused and with lot of knowledge skills. But somehow he did not put anything into practise. In April 2007 he was sent again for 3 weeks to “complete” his training. In his second stint in the village he tried to avoid hard work and spent more time in gossiping. Incidentally Pradip is very good at making friends and becoming close to people which he did with many village families. But in Kolkata he seemed to have lost all interest in what he had learnt. He did not seriously try to do any of the specific tasks related to bio fertilizers, herbal medicines, botanical pest controllers that he was supposed to. He even failed to supply pest controller asked by a Shikshamitra school teacher. Pradip had the best leadership skills in school; but now he had no interest in taking any responsibility. And he stopped doing whatever academic work he used to do earlier. From August, after discussing with his mother, Pradip came to school only part time. He is quite good at craft work and had joined the Learn-Earn class,

but younger and less skilled children were doing better than him. He was given some herb seeds to grow at home with specific incentive of ready market for those herbs . But all of them were dead and no particular remorse or initiative was seen from Pradip to give it a serious try. The only place where he showed his old spark was taking leadership-organizing role in the cooking classes. But we became very careful about arranging any fresh inputs for him. Like many slum children , Pradip’s attention span was low ; his interest in anything very short lived . He is also the youngest pampered son of a poor family and can get away without seriously thinking about earning although he is 18 years old. Pradip gradually started bullying the younger children and disrupting group activities. We were checkmated as to what Shikshamitra could do for him and called his parents for discussions in December and he left in January 2006. Pradip worked for some time in an Iron grill factory and currently works in a marble cutting-polishing unit.

Case Study 4 : Annu Khatun ,15

Annu failed twice in Class V of Chetla Girls School and was thrown out . When she joined Shikshamitra she had a very low self image. With the totally different curriculum at Shikshamitra , Annu very soon was “found” to be very good in singing , dancing and drawing. Although not as sharp as Shajahan or Biki , she developed quite good language skills with probably the best handwriting. So everything led to her gaining confidence and poise. But her home life is very disturbed. Her father is a habitual swindler . alcoholic, drug addict and liar. Her mother works as a masseur and used to have lucrative clients till recently. The parents have violent quarrels; are on verge of separation ; constantly being cajoled to stay together by older children. Annu also is a compulsive and very convincing liar. She is extremely manipulative ,cunningly instigating fights among other children, is often quite violent with younger children , and able to disrupt the whole class. In this she is quite close to her previous classmate Pinky whom we asked to leave in Dec 2006. From early 2007 Annu’s concentration was waning and her disruptive behaviour was on the rise. From July’07 her attendance became quite irregular and in early September’07 she decided to quit school with the declaration that she just wants to have fun. In the locality she is seen moving around with Pinky. All through 2007 she has complained that she wanted to continue and so does her mother . But that her father wants her to learn some Urdu and then wants to marry her off. But we are totally exhausted with the constant contradictory statements which Annu and her mother keep on making .It is clear that this reflects their domestic violence , confusion, real lack of options etc. But Shikshamitra , as of now, does not have the resources to handle such cases. Annu had written a beautiful letter in September ’07 saying that she probably would like to continue as a part timer like Pradip. But she never came back. Annu is now a member of a dance troupe which performs in various homes and in public on social occasions. She claims to earn Rs.500 for a whole day when the troupe gets an assignment.

**VIII. Production of relevant & innovative Teaching Learning Materials**

This is one of the major objectives of Shikshamitra. We will produce our own materials . We will collect excellent materials form all possible sources, translate , modify , and try it out in our own school . Whatever is effective we will give it to others to try . And after proper testing we will make them widely available. In this third year we have finally been able to start coming up with some quality materials which we can give to others . Increasing the pool of of competent and creative outside resource persons to do such work is also an important task.

VIII A : Materials produced in-house

1	Worksheets	Plenty of worksheets of all subjects produced : (i) Bengali story based open-ended comprehension worksheets (ii) Picture based comprehension worksheets (iii) Film based worksheets ( example : Modern Times , Tramp by Charlie Chaplin, Sound of Music , Satyajit Ray film HIRAK RAJAR DESHE , Dhoom 2, Taare Zameen Par etc ) (iv) Issue based worksheets which make children think like fights , disability , flags and national symbols , plastic , sanctuary etc. (v) Remediation worksheets for common language mistakes made by children (vi) cooking related worksheets on nutrition, maths, history, geography, science
2	Bengali story book by children of Shikshamitra	A book of 14 stories “ Lekha Theke Golpe” written and illustrated by children was published in June’07 and is now being used as class text with appropriate TLM. This book has been highly appreciated by others .All copies kept with a stall in the March’08 book fair were sold. We have to do better “marketing” . An English version has also been published and circulated .

3	Translations of pieces on “textiles”	The chapters “Story of a Shirt” from NCERT and “History of Textile Industry in India “ from Eklavya Social Studies text books were translated into Bengali and used in our “Learn-Earn” class on textiles
4	Redesigning story and poem	The well known story “Boka Jola” by Upendrakishore Raychoudhry and poem “Katukutu Buro” by Sukumar Ray have been redesigned with large font size, larger pictures, proper page design, interesting word arrangement to make it reader friendly and enjoyable.
5	Maths Book and worksheets	Very high quality Bengali Maths book with much better and fun methods have been written for Classes I - V . Yet to be published. Similarly an interesting and enjoyable Maths Practise book in Bengali has been produced for Class III and V . Plenty of worksheets, original and translated from English texts are ready for other classes also.
6	Children’s writing of another NGO	Shikshamitra carried out a 3 month creative writing workshop with 17 children of another NGO ---DAS . This culminated in a book of the children’s best writing “Amader Lekha”
7	Story collection for classes III-IV	There is a dearth of 1-2 page simple enjoyable stories for below 10 age group . So we produced a collection of stories “Galpo 1” which has 32 stories organised into themes like Forest, Rain, Friends, Animal, Staying together, Over-smartness . There are 7 stories written by teachers, 6 by children, 5 of Tolstoy, 3 Inuit folk tales, 3 translated from Eklavya books, and others include Japanese, African folktales, Hans Christian Anderson, Aesop fable etc. We will produce more such collections . They have large font size, gaps for children to do drawings and illustrations, and the difficulty level increases through the book.
8	Bengali story book by children - 2	This called “Lekha Theke Golpe 2” is another compilation of stories by children of Shikshamitra and DAS and has been designed and will soon go to the printer.
9	Problem Solving materials	We have collected various puzzles, riddles, games for analytical thinking, increasing observation skills etc. Some of the collected material had to be translated, re-designed, and some new but similar material was made.

#### VIII B : Materials produced by Others on assignment

1	Picture story films for teaching English	An expert volunteer Sayak from Los Angeles came and made 4 new “picture story” videos ( Rainbow Fish, Honu the Turtle, Ekki Dokki, Moondance ) and modified 4 old ones made by DSH of Lkhnow .
2	Simplification of stories	There is a strong need for simplified abridged versions of classic children’s literature. This year we got three well known short stories of Satyajit Ray done by Bani Banerjee : Brihat Chanchu, Jadukor ,
3	Translation of story	The idea is to translate beautifully illustrated stories of other languages . This year we got “Death in Eden” by famous artist K.G.Subramaniam translated from English to Bengali by Bani Banerjee.
4	New Social Studies texts	There is a strong need for social studies chapters on various burning relevant issues which are missing in Bengali school text books, but have started appearing in NCERT and other progressive texts. We got Sandip Bandopadhyay to write on three topics --- “media”, “market”, “gender” which can be read by students and also used by teachers as resource materials.

#### IX . Input to Others

This is the other major activity as a Resource Centre. We have started giving various kinds of inputs to others in our third year. Apart from the specific interventions made, we have had many meetings and queries, and next year promises to be quite a busy one for us .

#### IX A .: Trainings and workshops conducted

1	Class Management	4 May’07 : one day orientation for teachers of a private school for underprivileged children called “Our Lady of Providence Convent” by Sudeshna
2	Language Teaching : How	5-7 May’07 at Andharmanik : By Ankur on “How to read a text” to 14 teachers from Swanirvar’s 4 rural schools, 2 teachers from two NGO schools, 9 teachers

	to Read a Text	from 9 govt schools. This has turned out to be a big success with many of the trainee teachers and they have started using it in their classroom
3	Language problems and reading	11 June'07 at Shikshamitra : To 14 teachers from Swanirvar's 4 rural schools , 16 teachers from 12 govt schools and 1 from another NGO school . This was the first training at our Kolkata premises by Sudeshna
4	How to use picture story films	19 July'07 at Andharmanik : Orientation to 8 teachers of Swanirvar rural schools on how to use picture story films for teaching English
5	Creative Writing course for DAS	16 Aug - Nov'07 : Ankur and Sudeshna conducted "Developing Writing Skills" course consisting of 24 classes for 17 children who would become peer leaders of the NGO Development Action Society ( DAS) in Bantala area ( Easter Bypass ) of Kolkata
6	Remedial teaching wshop	8-11 Sep'07 : Sudeshna conducted a two day workshop on remedial teaching for the same group as in Item 3 above and then visited a few of the schools
7	Purulia schools (poorest hilly tribal district)	Ankur took demonstration classes in the Kishore Bharati Residential high school to show how language can be taught differently. He also visited the NGO Mandra Lions Club pre-primary schools to see how local culture could be incorporated in the classroom.
8	Visits to primary and Govt high schools in Swanirvar rural area	10-11 Dec'07 : Ankur visited two Swanirvar primary schools at Fatullapur and Chandalati to watch the effect of Language workshop of May 2007 and also to make helpful general suggestions . He also visited two govt high schools where Swanirvar KKB wing conducts Environment classes. ( <b>Swanirvar KKB dept. takes classes in 17 rural govt high schools where Shikshamitra can make important interventions in the next 1-2 years</b> )
9	Teachers Capacity Building in Swanirvar rural	3 Feb , 2 March : We have started a systematic once a month interaction with teachers of Swanirvar rural schools and adjoining govt primary schools for building up their overall capacities . This is purely voluntary and has been conducted so far mostly by Ankur and was very intense mix of exercises, dialogue, watching films, hearing songs , group work etc. The first class on 3 Feb'08 was on the theme "nation" and second one on "relationship" .
10	Puzzles and Games	13-15 Feb'08 : Biswajit was part of Swanirvar's team giving training to SVVPS primary teachers at Durgapur and conducted a highly enjoyable session on Problem Solving Puzzles and Games
11	The use of map as planning tool for rural NGO workers	24-25 Mar'08 at Seva Kendra Kolkata , Science Communicators Forum organized a workshop on the use of map for village workers from many districts where Malasree was one of the resource persons .

#### IX B : Misc Contacts and Meetings

1	Kolkata Govt High Schools	Intense discussions with 2 govt schools in North Kolkata and 4 govt schools in Chetla area during April – June'07 for possible interventions . But due to new 9 Unit Tests for each subject and class introduced by govt. and other common reasons ( teachers apprehensions , staff conflicts ) , the talks fizzled out
2	HOPE Foundation	Visited us on 18 July'07 to enquire about a training need assessment of their teachers and also an aptitude testing and vocational guidance for 14+ age group children
3	Sahanagar Boys School	Ex student association of this local govt school invited us on 19 Aug to advise them on how to save the school from closure as hardly anyone was passing Class X board exam and students were dwindling
4	AID Kolkata	Wrote to us on 10 <sup>th</sup> Sep asking for teachers training at Mathurapur , S 24 Pgns
5	National Knowledge Commission	Meeting attended by Sujit on 24-25 August at the Centre for the Studies in Social Sciences in Kolkata for the states of Bengal and Orissa . Discussions were part of all India consultations to come up with major recommendations on school education for next 10 years to be given to Govt of India
6	Mennonite Central Committee MCC	This funding agency's representatives came on 12 Sep'07 asking for curricular and training inputs for their project in Garden Reach area

7	CINI ASHA	Came to LC on 17 <sup>th</sup> Sep 2007 and discussions were held again in Dec 2007 on Library based activity programme . Something likely in year 2008-09 .
8	GOAL . Kolkata	Correspondence with this funding agency on 20 Sep 2007 . They want some inputs for their partners
9	Suchana, Santiniketan	NGO runs pre-primary and primary schools for mostly tribals . Talks in Nov – Dec 2007 . They want some inputs in 2008-09
10	Sociology Dept, Jadavpur University	Sudeshna invited to give a talk on “Education and Conflict” at a seminar in Sociology dept. of Jadavpur University on 18 Jan’08
11	Nibedita Seva Mandir , Kolkata	Situated close by in Bhavanipur , they run coaching and activity centres. They came to LC on 15 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2007 ; further discussions were held on 24 March. Want teacher’s training and various courses for their students
12	PRAJAK	Came to LC on 18 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2008 : Want inputs for railway platform schools in Malda and Kharagpur
13	Madrasah , Bauria , Howrah ,	This secondary girls school with 900 students was started by NGO Tajmahal Gram Bikas Kendra . Spoke to key person Renu on 21 <sup>st</sup> Feb 2008 .They want inputs
14	Wipro Forum, Jaipur	Sujit attended the national forum of school educationists sponsored by Wipro at Digantar , Jaipur, Rajasthan from 4-6 March’08.

### **X. Materials for Teachers and Other Adults**

Making interesting and useful materials for teachers and schools is one of the main aims of Shikshamitra . We also want to make materials for all other school education stakeholders like parents , researchers , academicians , administrators , NGOs, govt. decision makers . Networking for collaborations and larger changes is also an important agenda.

1	Bhashar Kotha : Sandip Bandopadhaya --- a 23 page book in Bengali for teachers. The book explains with simple examples the science of teaching language and ending up with the theory of whole word approach
2	A practical step by step manual ( sequel to above book) in Bengali on “Whole Word Reading Approach” a method for teaching language to older children by Malini Mukherjee ( ex Shikshamitra staff) and edited by Sandip Bandopadhyay
3	Review of new NCERT middle school Geography books by Malasree Dasgupta
4	Translation by Somashri Choudhry of the review of new NCERT Maths book published in Education Dialogue
5	Translation of the book “Tips for Teachers” of Brendan McCarthaigh on simple but highly useful classroom management methods from English to Bengali
6	Banaan Niye --- Sandip Bandopadhaya : A simple book on rules of spelling as there have been many changes recently and there are lots of confusion.
7	Alternate Science Curriculum : Experienced educationist and science teacher Neeraja Raghavan was assigned to come up with an alternate science curriculum for middle school. This document is ready. A Bengali summary of the main ideas has also been done by Mohua Dutta .
8	Parts of the book “Education and Peace” by Jane Sahi , her essay on „Problems of Alternate Schools“ have been translated into Bengali by Mahua Dutta and Malasree . A Bengali summary of Jane Sahi’s main ideas has also been done by Mahua .
9	Review of websites : This year we read and wrote small reviews for 53 school education related websites . This task was started by Somashri and completed by Malasree
10	A Directory of 35 Kolkata based Education resource organizations was compiled by three volunteers Aishi Dipta Lahiri, Soumya Kanti Pal , and Soumya Chattopadhyay of S.P.Jain Institute of Management , Mumbai through visits to the various organizations in Dec-Jan 2007-08.
11	A teacher/ trainer ’s manual for conducting a “Course on Creative Writing” --- this came out of the intensive work and documentation of such a course conducted for Child Peer Leaders of the NGO – DAS by Ankur and Sudeshna

## **XI . Vocational**

- Two visits were made to the West Bengal State Council for Vocational Education and Training (WBSCVET) on 6<sup>th</sup> May and 25<sup>th</sup> June to establish relations with them
- In order to set up a “vocational Guidance Centre “ we spoke to an expert career counsellor , but no suitable testing materials was found. We also contacted Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy who have such materials for disabled children , which might also be applicable to “normal” children. We shall soon contact them . We enquired with the psychology dept of Kolkata University who have something , but it seems not so useful. We have also spoken to an organization in Delhi which does testing in elite schools . Next year we will try and develop something ourselves
- To expand and verify all the information we had collected in the last two years regarding vocational training institution in the state we hired a person on 7 month assignment. As a result now we have 119 institutes in our database , 48 of them govt and 71 private , and 5 were deleted from our previous list as they have stopped functioning . Through visits, letters , and phone calls we were able to verify details of 40 institutes mostly in Kolkata . Two of them have showed a lot of interest to try innovative things . We were also able to establish contacts with a well known institution in Pune through a volunteer.

## **XII . Other Developments and News**

1. Older children took part in a biodiversity project on an abandoned dock of the area as part of the National Children’s Science Congress
2. A quarterly e-newsletter was started and first issue for April-June 2007 was circulated in July-Aug’07 .Second issue brought out for the period Oct’07-Jan ’08 and was circulated in Feb’08.
3. Two day special leadership classes held on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Jan’08 for 14+ age group ( there were 10 current and 5 ex students ) . This was conducted by Sukhendu ( ex teacher ) with Biswajit as assistant
4. In the basic evening Computer course , children came for one hour classes twice a week. The first batch of 8 students gave an exam and completed the basic course in Dec’07; the second batch ( 4 are left in this batch ) will give finishing exam in April’08 . The 3<sup>rd</sup> batch of 12 started their basic course in Jan’08. Another 24 have enrolled for courses to start from mid April 2008 out of which 12 are for the basic ( 4<sup>th</sup> batch) and 12 for a new advanced course. .
5. Arranging and creating a database for 1400 books and documents was done by June. We have kept on adding both children’s books and for adults , specially quite a few from Sage publications.
6. Four parent’s meetings were held in the school
  - i) 26 July’07 meeting which included prize distribution
  - ii) 19 Sep’07 where many parents wanted “books” that their children should “read loudly” and lots of “homework”. Some of this was effectively countered by the children themselves.
  - (iii) 20<sup>th</sup> Dec’07 where the children planned and exhibited their work including all their art – craft work.
  - (iv) 14<sup>th</sup> March’08 before the Annual exam , where the children in 3 batches showed all the books that they had read , to their parents .Senior most Biki and Shajahan explained their resolve to go towards Board exam and gradually start studying the govt books.
7. We had 4 set of volunteers helping us out : Shibasish Pramanik ( heading to US for Ph.D) in vocational ; Sayak ( from Los Angeles ) with audiovisuals ; Rita Ganguly ( from UC Berkeley) with English teaching ; Aishi Dipta Lahiri, Soumya Kanti Pal , and Soumya Chattopadhyay of S.P.Jain Institute of Management , Mumbai with the Kolkata Education Directory.

# SHIKSHAMITRA

## An Alternative School and Education Resource Centre

62 B Alipore Road , Kolkata 700027, 033-2479-9271, [shikshamitra.kolkata@gmail.com](mailto:shikshamitra.kolkata@gmail.com)  
(<http://shikshamitrlearning.blogspot.com/>)

Report April 2008 - March 2009

### **1. Morning Full Time School :**

During this period there were **22 students** ( Senior 4 ; Middle 12 ; Junior 7 ) out of which 14 were boys and 8 girls

- All children took part in maintaining the school premises – cleaning, filling water, and garbage disposal. Slowly they are getting involved in other activities of running the place such as photocopying; Samrat was in charge of regular maintenance of the music system and English Work Cards; Baloram was gradually being trained in office maintenance ( [case study 1](#) )
- The senior students helped in running bigger programmes such as Sunday workshops for other children ( see 3 below ) .
- The 4 seniors Bikey, Shajahan, Mohan , Dolly got “enrolled” in Rabindra Mukto Vidyalaya ( West Bengal govt Open School) for appearing in the Open School Board exams from Dec 2009. Dolly has dropped out of Shikshamitra after March 31<sup>st</sup> 2009.

### **2. Evening Computer Class :**

There were **45 students** this year . 33 of them were doing one year Basic Course and 12 were in one year Advanced Course . 38 of them study in local govt high schools and colleges ; 7 of them are no longer regular school students out of whom one is employed and needs computer skills in her job.

### **3. Sunday Classes for Children attending Other Local Schools :**

( **Maximum 33 students** )

*This was our new initiative-- an attempt to try to make Shikshamitra into a truly Open Learning Centre ( [case study 2](#) )*

Four events were held on four Sundays so far:

1. 22<sup>nd</sup> June – workshop on “Innovative Drawing and Writing” – a total of 33 children from 5 clubs of Chetla area participated . All of them study in the local govt schools. 8 parents/guardians had come along.
2. 7<sup>th</sup> Sep – eye camp for school students, parents, evening school students, children from local clubs . A total 69 people were examined (incl. parents - 5, club secretaries -2, and staff - 8)  
The camp was organised with the help of Eye Foundation, Kolkata. A total of 5 doctors and a team of opticians had come. 13 students of the Morning school and 8 students of the computer class received specs.
3. 14<sup>th</sup> Sep – “Fun English and Drawing” . This was conducted by Maura and assisted by Sudeshna
4. 21<sup>st</sup> Sep – “Fun Maths and Puzzles”. This was conducted by Biswajit and external resource person Priyatosh Dutta

### **5. Shikshamitra children give Inputs to Others**

**5.1 To Rural Primary School Children April 25-27, 2008** : A three day trip to Swanirvar was organised for all the students in April . The children taught art-work to village children on 25<sup>th</sup> April . As a result now 4 primary schools run by Swanirvar and 10 govt primary schools ( catering to about 1000 children )



around Baduria have beautifully painted wall murals done by the children of those schools

**5.2 Praajak Kharagpur Railway Shelter Oct 25, 2008 :** Bikey and Rohit along with Biswajit went and helped the children there to paint the walls of their shelter.

**5.3 Snegam Jan 3, 2009 :** Shajahan, Mohan, Rohit, Priyanka, Chandrika went to school run by the NGO Snegam to teach Art Switch

**5.4 At St.Xaviers Shishu Mela Feb 8, 2009 :** Some of the children (Bikey, Anita, Shajahan, Mohan, Dolly, Rohit, Samrat, Hasna, Priyanka, ) taught dress designing, T-shirt painting at Sishu Mela, organized by St. Xavier college, Kolkata . These children worked as volunteers along with the students of St. Xavier college (dressed in volunteer's T Shirts) and handled the activity corners specially designated to teach various arts and crafts.

**5.5 To Calcutta Rescue Feb 19, 2009 :** 10 people from Calcutta Rescue had come to Shikshamitra – Bikey, Baloram with teacher Bali taught them book-binding

## **6. Production by Children ( Learn & Earn )**

Children have continued from last year to produce the following : Eco bags , coasters , cloth patches which can be stitched on to various items; book marks , cards , paper bags , envelopes, book binding , macramé products from thread. This year they have added terracotta jewellery, small pocket diaries, small flower pots.

Four students who have become good are doing commercial book binding work .

## **7. Outdoor Trips**

(i) On July 24 , children visited the local Kiln where pottery items are baked

(ii) On Nov 5, 2008 Kakoli, Rohit. Babai and Baloram visited Calcutta Rescue – to learn Doll Making

(iii) On Nov 14, 2008 Children's Day was celebrated through a boat ride on river Hoogly including a trip to Belur Math

(iv) On Nov 26, 2008 all the children went to Studio 21 – to see an exhibition displaying art and craft of Madhya Pradesh

(v) On Jan 13, 2009 five children – Pradip, Anita, Hasna, Kakoli and Priyanka went to RCFC to participate in an art workshop

(vi) On March 31 , 2009 Kakoli, Anita, Neha, Rohit, Babai, Samrat, Chaitali went to CIMA Art Gallery – to see an exhibition “THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE” )

## **8. Visitors**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Comments</u>
June 30, 2008	The Dwight School, USA	8 students came to India as part of an Exchange programme with The International School, Kolkata. They and two teachers spent a day with Shikshamitra children playing , singing , dancing , doing crafts . It was very enjoyable.
July 24, 2008	Dr. Sumita Basu	She is a pediatrician. She spoke to the students about Health and Hygiene.
Aug 14, 19 , 08	Crisanti , USA	Taught the children certain techniques of pencil sketching
July 3rd – Aug 15 , 2008	Daniela Petuchowski, Chicago, USA	Came to do Internship. On two occasions she taught the children some Aerobics. Regularly helped out with the Craft class.
Sept 19, 2008	Soumya Chakraborty	Demonstration of musical instruments – Anando Lahari

	and Sandip Samaddar	and Dotara and a session on music
Oct 24 , 2008	Heidi , Germany	Dance workshop
Jan – Feb 2009	Yuki , Japan	Art class (sketch with pen). He took 8 sessions

## **9. New Materials produced by Shikshamitra**

- **Maths work-book** – for classes I and II together, and III and IV together
- **“Lekha Theke Golpe 2 “** The second compiled book of stories written by children was published in May . It contains 16 illustrated stories ; 9 by Shikshamitra and rest by DAS students
- **“Bagher Golpo”** – three stories on tigers from famous book by Upendrokishore Raychoudhry “Tuntunir Boi” re-designed into large font , large pictures and general restructuring . This was done by Sipra following the style developed by Ankur ( who re-wrote “Boka Jola” and “Katukutu Buro” last year )
- **History of school ( Skuler Itihas)** – in Bengali by Sandip Bandopadhyay, for students as well as teachers
- **“Dakghor Porchi”** – by Ankur Roychoudhury .The is strictly not our publication. It is a book on "Teaching Tagore to Slum Children" on the experience of teaching the famous Tagore theatre Dak Ghar ( Post Office ) to Shikshamitra children by our ex teacher Ankur. This book has been published by the well known Viswabharati publications and it is the first of a series called "Tagore in Classroom"
- **Posters** : which are to be used as teaching aids (i) mask with a quote by Picasso on art and children (ii) mask with a cherokee poem in English and Bangla.
- **“Nana Bhabhe Lekha Jaye”** a booklet was the result of the 2 month writing wshop with DAS . This would be useful for teachers giving them examples of various kinds of illustrated creative writing
- **e – newsletter** : Only one issue of Shikshamitra’s e-newsletter was produced during this period .
- A **blog** site has also been started by Maura (<http://shikshamitralearning.blogspot.com/>) and regular updates are being posted here
- **in Teacher Plus** : Malasree Dasgupta wrote two articles (i) “Shikshamitra: Re-defining Schooling” in Nov-Dec,08 issue and “Rocks and Minerals” appeared in March ,09.
- in **Sambad Manthan**, Jan, 09 an article by Sudeshna Sinha “Itihaser Khoje: Kacher Theke Dure”
- in **Chiguru** ( Learning Network journal) Sujit Sinha’s article on “ alternative social science curriculum” appeared

## **10. Training Others**

**10.1 Nibedita Seba Mandir ( July – August, 2008 with 25 students ) [case study 3](#)**

**10.2 Praajak ( they run 4 railway platform children’s shelters in West Bengal ) [case study 4](#)**

**10.3 DAS ( Development Action Society ) : run many schools in slums of Eastern Kolkata [case study 5](#)**

### **10. 4 Rural govt primary teachers empowerment .**

15-25 govt primary school teachers are attending a Sunday “empowerment” workshop conducted by Sudeshna once in two months as per their demand. Five such wshops have been held this year  
**1. 28<sup>th</sup> Aug 2008** : The film “Taare Zameen Par” on a dyslexic child was shown along with intensive work on related worksheets and discussions

2. 23<sup>rd</sup> Nov 2008 : The story of five innovative schools ( i. Digantar of Jaipur- Rajasthan ; ii Kanavu school of Kerala ; iii Sita school of Jane Sahi near Banagalore ; iv Aksharnandan of Pune ; v Waldorf school ) were narrated followed by discussions

3. 11<sup>th</sup> Jan 2009 : The film on Kanavu school was shown. There was group work on Multiple Intelligence followed by very interesting discussions and presentations .

4. 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb , 2009 : An interesting piece “The Animal Parable” was given ; Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence was again discussed . This was followed by an exercise on how would they re-structure school time- table to handle multiple ways of learning . The task of refining this timetable was given as homework

5. 22<sup>nd</sup> March , 2009 : The day started with discussion on the timetable they had made last month and to extract the “points” to be kept in mind to create the routine for an alternative school. Tagore’s poem “River ( Nodi)” was given and participants had to figure how they would teach this differently to “different” kind of learners as per Gardner’s scheme. How to “evaluate” was just started with a reading from the delightful chapter “How much marks did Tagore get ?” from the book “A small School.” by Sankho Ghosh The day ended with a review of this whole programme .

## **11. Large Programmes**

**11.1 30-31<sup>st</sup> July 2008 : Two-day state level workshop on ‘Teaching English under difficult circumstances’** This was organized in collaboration with PRIA who are running a big programme called Civil Society Support Programme in West Bengal.. There were 3 outstation Resource Persons (one from Pune and two from Auroville) . There were 31 local participants including govt school teachers , govt trainers , NGO trainers , private school teachers .

**11.2 12-14 Dec 2008 : “Art in School” exhibition at Shikshamitra ( [case study 6](#) )**

This showcased the work done by Shikshamitra children in the last three years showing the central role of art and craft in teaching all subjects. This was a grand success and visitors included local children , their parents , many teachers of other schools , college professors , local counsellor, other NGOs.

**11.3 27 – 30<sup>th</sup> Dec 2008 : All India Education Conference of “Learning Network”**

This was LNet’s 6th all India annual conference and Swanirvar was the host. Shikshamitra played a vital role in organizing and conducting the conference where more than 100 persons from 10 different states of India participated. On two days there were three parallel sessions. Some were practical hands on workshops and some lecture – discussions on subjects like Art , Theatre , Science , Social Studies , Language , Child Psychology , Adivasi Education etc

**11.4 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan, 2009 : “Art in School” exhibition at Chetla slum ( [case study 7](#) )**

After discussions with mothers it was decided to hold the Art exhibition held in Shikshamitra from 12-14 Dec 2008 ( see above ) in the slum club from where most of the children come. This was grand success with many local children , parents and others coming to see , to ask questions , to draw-paint-do clay work. As a prelude to this we also had a very different mother’s meeting in November ( [case study 8](#) ) .

## **12. Shikshamitra attends Programme by Others :**

- 27<sup>th</sup> July , 08 : Sujit attended meeting at Seva Kendra on “Minimum Scientific Literacy” organized by Science Communications Forum.
- 30<sup>th</sup> August, 08 : Malasree attended a meeting about Child Reporter Programme organised by Community Radio—Jadavpur University
- 26<sup>th</sup> Nov,08 : Biswajit attended a meeting about launching Bangla website organised by DRCS, at Academy of Fine Arts

- 28<sup>th</sup> Nov, 08 : Malasree attended a meeting about intervention and advocacy in education and child protection organized by CINI ASHA.
- 5-6<sup>th</sup> Dec,08 : Shipra attended a workshop about Teaching Bengali, organised by Bal Vividha, at BITM and conducted by Pratham
- 1-8 March , 09 : Sudeshna , along with two Swanirvar primary school teachers , underwent an intensive training programme about various methods of Teaching English at Isai Ambalam School, Auroville.

### SHIKSHAMITRA STUDENTS PROFILE MARCH 2009

	Name	Age on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2009	Remarks	What next
1.	Dolly Guchait	17+	Academically v. poor ; thought of enrolling for open school ( Class X Rabindro Mukto Vidyalay) but is unable to cope and is not putting effort and is totally unwilling to study ; from very disturbed family specially mother ; has been a big trouble maker in school and disliked by all students ; has been stealing money and caught recently. She and her mother are capable of destroying the school. Quite good in Bengali ; really good at and likes to do all kinds of hand work and embroidery. Parents have been advised that this is her possible vocation , but they are un-willing.	She is being given a certificate and is leaving
2.	Mohan Kanji	16-7	LD ( Learning Disabled ) ; but putting in lot of effort for open school X ; talent in design- drawing- graphics . Family stable	All three will sit for class x exam in physical science, Bengali , Geography in Dec 2009
3.	Shajahan Ali Kaji	15-9	Family reasonably well off ; he helps in family run scrap shop ; good mechanical aptitude ; is one of the top "thinking" students and very balanced and sure about himself. Not too academic but wants to finish open school X .	
4.	Biki Sardar	15-2	The most academic ; family stable ; many in community think he is wasting his time in shikshamitra but Biki himself has been very firm about continuing in our school ; would like to go for higher studies	
5.	Rohit Naskar	16-4	Multi- talented ; performer ; good writer , thinker , artist , excellent at repair ; works in a motorbike repair shop . But no academic tenacity. He wants to finish Open school X . We will try but are not very sure whether he will last. Father drug addict ; lots of parental conflict. Family currently not able to eat two times a day !	Can be enrolled for Open school in Dec 2009 to start appearing in exam from Dec2010
6.	Hasna Banu	15	V poor family ; father quite caring rikshaw puller ; terrific development in shikshamitra ; her retention is poor ; but can go for class X	
7.	Ador Naiya	15	V poor family ; helps out in a shop as assistant and eats there ; would like to do Class X and should have no problems ; very determined person and had come from Hindi medium school in 2006 ; excellent at drawing – painting	
8.	Rahul Dube	15	Father drug addict , mother sells illegal alcohol ; had quit school in class VI ; came into shikshamitra last year; good at games ; would like to be associated with games . Ok student , but doubtful if he would want to complete Class X.	Games/physical education a possibility
9.	Surojit Haldar	15	Big family ; father – grandfather do not work; mother and grandmother earn and run family; came to shikshamitra in 2007 after quitting formal school; due to family financial problems had quit in 2008 and was working ; our social worker has been able to bring him back ; very hard working and good student ; can potentially finish Class X ; but we don't know how long we can keep him	Such willing poor students should get some scholarship
10.	Sheikh Samrat	15	Orphan and lives with grandmother ; has a disabled sister ; Very disturbed child ; acute persecution mania ; but remarkable change in last one year ; has shown capacity to take responsibilities . Not keen on academics ; wants to be part of hotel industry – catering; has already worked in food stalls of a Chinese neighbor.	Send to some hotel related training
11.	Priyanka Sardar	15	Stable home ; does not talk much and appears lifeless ; is ok in language ; she is definitely not the type to go for Class X exam.	Release after class VIII
12.	Shantanu Naskar	13	Rohit's brother ( see 5 above ) ; LD ; has ambitions of being a community leader and is capable of arrogance – manipulation-	We are unsure what to do with

			control ; has got involved with shady gangs ; very good organizer – managing people ; and in a sense he is quite fair and willing to admit mistakes ; he is one of the top verbal persons in the school in many subjects ; but currently he has the most severe writing problem in our school.	him. How to make him a “good” leader ?
13.	Kakoli Giri	13	Parents quite ambitious and believe in formal schooling; it is a mystery why they admitted their children ( see also 21 below ) into our school as they are forever complaining . Kakoli is a normal academic child and will do well in Class X . She enjoys shikshamitra	To continue
14.	Indu Malek	13	Not Bengali ; quite bright and hard working ; smart at conversation; mother very conservative and had almost married her off by withdrawing her from school.; due to persistent efforts of social worker and other teachers Indu is back in school; but mother has got Indu “engaged” and might withdraw her from school at any moment;	Class X material but likely to leave
15.	Anita Sardar	12	Biki’s sister ( see 4 above ) ; family wants academic performance ; she writes very well ; but in actual behavior she acts very stupid , “girlish” , and biased which does not match her writing !	Will continue
16.	Baloram Sardar	16	<b>Mentally Challenged</b> ; severe retention problem; father alcoholic ; very good at handicraft and quite organized ; will be excellent assistant in a work bench; mother very sensible ; maid servant in a very helpful family	Immediately into vocational
17.	Bijoy Naiya	14	Ador’s brother ( see 7 above ) ; <b>speech problem</b> ; had left shikshamitra for a year ; returned Nov 2008; very good artist and is a perfectionist ; helps many people in the slum ; computer graphics a possibility	Maximum another 2 yrs; look for vocation
18.	Babai Das	13	<b>LD</b> ; disturbed family ; mother main bread winner but very sick and cannot work; father comes once in a while ; Babai very good at craft – book binding ; computer graphics a possibility ; ok in maths . Elder brother Bapi used to come but has quit and is quite erratic . A younger sister	Would like to have some income right now
19.	Rajesh Sardar	12	Priyanka’s brother ( see 11 ) ; very naughty and family unable to control him; good at academics but refuses to give any effort ; slight improvement but his laziness is a problem.	Needs good counselor
20.	Chaitali Naskar	12	Ok in academics ; quite nervous and unsure of herself ; potentially a good dancer ; in everything she says “ I cant do “ . How to build her confidence is the issue	We should get her dancing training
21.	Pradip Giri	10	Brother of Kakoli ( 13 above ) . Just the opposite of Chaitali ; over confident – eager – good learner – fast worker . Parents are perpetually unhappy and keep on talking about withdrawing him and sister from our school	To continue
22.	Neha Gomes	8	She showed signs of LD in writing when admitted in sep 08 ; but in 6 months her development has been terrific and she does not seem to have any problems; very eager learner ; always concerned about others ; good dancer; excellent verbally ; good artist	To continue

### **Case Study 1 : How to deal with the late-coming and absenteeism in School ; children decide and take responsibility**

Regular absenteeism has always been a problem in Shikshamitra . Problems faced by these children are many – quite often these children are expected to perform various domestic duties before coming to school, stay back to look after younger siblings as both parents are working, etc. The winter in Calcutta is also very mild and nice and perhaps makes the children a bit lazy. And so quite often some of the children simply bunk school as they ‘do not feel like coming ’. The problem became so acute that *Big Auntie* (Principal , Sudeshna Sinha) decided to have a meeting with all the children and teachers. The open discussion is a regular practice at Shikshamitra. Quite often it brings out various underlying currents that are part of the dynamics of young children. The sessions are designed to make the children think , discuss and help to resolve some of the difficulties .

So in Feb 2008 , the students and teachers gathered in the big classroom to have a discussion. The children mentioned the problems they face. During discussions it was mentioned that the organization Nibedita Seba Mandir has a fine system for not coming to class. At the end of the session, it was decided

by the students that a fine of Rs 3/ would be charged for late-coming, and Rs 5/ for absence from school when the child has no good reason to stay away . The issue of late coming of teachers also came up. And so it was also decided that the fine would be collected from both students and teachers. When asked what will happen to this money , the children responded that this would be used for excursions One of the students, Rohit Naskar volunteered to collect the fines.

Since April 2008 , there has been a tremendous impact of this – the absenteeism from school has reduced drastically. Although some children have not been able to pay the fines for all the days they were absent, they are definitely conscious about their act. The fact that teachers (including the Principal) pay the fine too, help the children appreciate the importance of these values. Rohit has done a good job in collecting the fine ; reminding people gently but not pestering anyone.

*So along with cleaning the school , taking care of drinking water, doing photocopying jobs, helping with internal programmes, helping with Sunday community classes , taking care of the music system, the students have added this activity as their contribution towards running the school and learning to do specific tasks and being responsible.*

### **Case Study 2 : Sunday class for “other” children ; On our way to becoming an “Open Learning Centre”**

In May 2008 Shankar and Biswajit approached all the 9 clubs in the neighbourhood. They had several discussions regarding the possibility of exposing the children associated with these clubs to the joy and fun involved in learning and doing things together , programmes which would be different from the regular competitions that are held everywhere. 5 of the clubs responded.

The first Sunday workshop on “Creative Writing & Drawing” was conducted on 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2008 between 10:30a.m. and 12:30 p.m. The 33 participants, all school goers of the age group 10-15, were divided into two groups. There were two parallel session of one hour --- for art and another for writing-drawing. . The writing-drawing workshop was conducted by Ms.Sudeshna Sinha with assistance from Samrat and Shajahan; the art workshop was conducted by Ms. Maura Hurley with assistance from Bikey and Mohan. Dolly and Hasna helped in the overall management of the programme. After one hour the two groups of children switched over . The writing group went to do art and vice versa.

Listening to a popular Bengali song and responding to that in writing and drawing comprised the writing programme. The children were not accustomed to this kind of task, hence they took a few minutes to realize actually what was happening. At the end all children produced a piece which was put up on the wall.

In the art class they did “Switch Art” where a big collage is created by combining small square paper pieces . The novelty is that each small piece is rapidly “switched” between a circle of participants so that almost every child has done some art on every piece. And the final product is truly a combined effort. This is a totally new concept and many children do not like this dissolving of their individual effort.

We took feedback from the club secretaries and the parents/guardians present. Although the club secretaries liked the spirit of the programme and welcomed the idea of “participation by all”, *many parents/guardians were unhappy with the “equal treatment” to all ; they felt that the talent of their wards were not appreciated enough.*

Mr. Sukhendu Santra, ex-employee of Shikshamitra gave a certificate and a copy of “Lekha Theke Golpe”, the lovely story book written by Shikshamitra children last year , to each participant .

At the end, we collected feedback from the participants . While some were happy , some others were quite disappointed. They did not like the idea of everyone getting the same “prize” , of their own work not being judged the “best”. Three of them said they will not come again ; and on probing it turned out that they considered themselves worthy of special prizes. There was also a lot of misuse of materials.

*Overall , as expected, the atmosphere of “beating the others ” is all pervasive among children and adults. The school system , umpteen TV shows, local competitions of various sorts --- all are vigorously promoting the value of “one upmanship”. Our small attempts to reverse this can be confusing, irritating , and quite unexpected to many.*

*We have had three more Sunday events ( See the section 5.1.2 of the report) and now we have only 2 of the original 5 clubs participating. It is interesting that Shankar had a tendency to succumbing to local pressure of providing more of the same stuff that they routinely get elsewhere. But our aims and objectives are different and we have to persist , if necessary , with small numbers.*

### **Case Study 3 Giving inputs to “tuition centre” children of Nibedita Seba Mandir**

Nibedita Seba Mandir (henceforth Nibedita) , a voluntary organization in Bhabanipur area of Kolkata, mainly provides tuition service to the children of the nearby slums. The founder of Nibedita Ms Moumita De and her father felt that there is scope for further activities that would eventually enrich the socio-cultural understanding and overall learning experience of these children. They approached Shikshamitra to provide trainings that would empower both the children and their teachers. The tuition teachers are a group of volunteers – many of whom are college students.

After the initial discussion between Sudeshna and Moumita De, it was decided that Shikshamitra will take up this assignment for a two-month trial period. Moumita and her father visited Shikshamitra a couple of times between early February and April 2008. They liked many of the activities that are done regularly at Shikshamitra. They chose Craft, Library and Book Binding for children; Mathematics and Writing Skill for the teachers.

Since most of their teachers are volunteers, it was difficult to coordinate the timing and the teachers training never took place . However Mahua Dutta, Maura Harley, Biswajit Chitrakar and Sudeshna Sinha were able to conduct a regular Thursday evening session with the children over a period of two months ( July –August 2008 ) . Baliraj Das, our expert book-binder was introduced to them, and he started and continues to do a few sessions on book-binding separately. The students are mostly of the age group 10-15, and are studying in various schools in the vicinity.

Mohua conducted four sessions with the children doing the basics of Library development. She taught the children how to prepare the catalogues of the books , maintain lending records and gradually move on to generate interesting writings from the library, such as newsletters. *Some of the students come from an orphanage which is a sister concern of Nibedita. These children have made good use of their training and are now maintaining a library in their orphanage.*

Maura had four session doing art and craft. On the first day they did Art-switch which was a grand success. *Two students of Shikshamitra –Bikey and Baloram assisted Maura in Art-Switch.*

Biswajit conducted a session on puzzles and games.

However, there were some problems.

- Parents of these children were not very keen on this programme. They felt that the children were wasting valuable study time on Thursdays.
- Although Moumita said that the number of children would be around 15, almost 25 to 28 children turned up on every occasion. This caught our teachers unawares as the material they carried (for craft, puzzles, etc) were insufficient.
- The children had no sense of timing. Quite often many of them turned up just before the session ended. This caused frustration among our teachers.
- It was agreed in the beginning that at least one staff member of Nibedita would be present in every session to monitor and to learn so that they can carry it forward. Unfortunately, apart from Moumita and her father there is no regular staff. And it was not possible for them to attend the sessions.
- Our feeling was that the two persons running Nibedita probably felt that Shikshamitra inputs hadn't produced anything “tangible” and they were not satisfied about the fact that there were no “tests”.

The programme concluded in August.

*Our learning is that unless the organization has a person who is able to give time for learning the new skills, understanding the philosophy , trying to do the activities hands- on, thinking about them --- our inputs will have limited impact. Shikshamitra staff were giving time in the evenings and preparing for the sessions during the day apart from their heavy load of regular work. So in the absence of receptive*

*“key person/s” our effort had limited impact.*

*The good news is that some Shikshamitra students are turning out to be good teachers themselves. They have also taught “art switch” and “wall murals” to many rural primary school children and already 10 govt primary schools have nicely decorated walls.*

#### **Case Study 4 : Capacity Building of the Teachers of Praajak working with Railway Platform children**

Praajak is a social development organization working since 1997 with children in juvenile homes, with those living on railway platforms, and children facing violence and sexual abuse. Praajak aims to create an environment of care and protection for these children as well as their rehabilitation.

The programme for railway platform children aims to teach them elementary mathematics and basic reading and writing skills in Bangla. But there are some very tricky problems (a) most of the children are quite irregular (b) when they come to the Railway Platform Drop-in-Centre, it is often for a very short period (c) it is always a very mixed group – some who have attended school and some who are totally illiterate (d) the children also have quite low attention span and their limit of a learning session is 20-30 minutes (e) many of these children are not Bengalis and need to be taught in Hindi; but none of the Praajak teachers can read or write Hindi

Sudeshna Sinha and Biswajit Chitrakar visited their centres at Kharagpur and Maldah railway stations to do a Need Assessment in April – May 2008.

The workshop was held from 10-13 July 2008 at Shikshamitra and was attended by 7 teachers and one supervisor from Praajak and 3 teachers from Shikshamitra. On the first two days, the emphasis was on developing basic language skills by Sudeshna and a session on puzzles and games by Biswajit. On the third day, Mr. Gopal Mondol and Mr. Safikar Ali of Swanirvar taught how mathematics can be done in a fun way. The fourth day was devoted to evaluation, feedback and making some materials based on the newly acquired techniques. Some of the other main issues discussed during the workshop were :

- How to design a curriculum that will help those learners who are unable to attend the classes regularly.
- Use of library
- How can one teacher be effective in teaching multi-grade children
- Since these children have no home, they cannot be given any home work and the entire learning process must be accomplished at the Drop-in Centre with the help of the facilitator. The teacher must know how to organize such learning environment.
- Teaching of elementary mathematics using simple objects.

The Praajak team had hoped to make some more of the necessary TLMs during the workshop. But that was not possible within the workshop time. On the other hand, they have a very enthusiastic and competent supervisor ( Indra ) and he along with some of the teachers have, in the weeks after the training, made a large number of TLMs. These have been shown to us and some of them are of very good quality.

They have also sent us an implementation report till end August. We have to make a follow up visit after the Durga Puja holidays in November. The issue of actually dealing with their “classrooms” cannot be handled at Shikshamitra and has to be tried and demonstrated in the field.

Railway platform with a fleeting child group is obviously a very difficult situation for carrying out effective learning. *What we have learnt is that the presence of an intelligent, sensitive, committed leader ( Indra) who is willing and able to give a lot of time in the actual details of teaching and in continuously motivating the “fairly weak” teachers does make a difference.* And so we are also encouraged to give more effort to this difficult endeavor.

#### **Case Study 5 ; How to teach Reading-Writing : Training the teachers of Development Action Society (DAS)**

Sudeshna Sinha and Ankur Roychoudhury of Shikshamitra conducted a three month writing workshop with the children of DAS last year ( Aug-Nov 2007) . The aim of that workshop was grooming few



selected children to become peer leaders in their respective communities. At the end of the workshop those children came up with many interesting writings. A collection of their stories – *Amader Lekha* – was brought out by Shikshamitra and DAS. The success of that workshop encouraged the DAS teachers to seek a training from Shikshamitra, and the organizers of DAS felt that such a workshop for the teachers would eventually benefit many more children in the long-run. Hence, a two month (16 sessions) workshop was conducted by Sudeshna Sinha for the teachers of Non-Formal Education Centres, coaching centres, and Shikshalaya centres ( govt supported bridge schools ) of DAS. A total of 17 teachers participated in this workshop.

The teachers wanted specific inputs for addressing the age group of 8-12. These children know the letters of the alphabet, and can frame simple words. Their difficulty lies in Reading, Writing and Spelling. Hence, the sessions were planned accordingly – half the time for Reading exercises, and the rest of the time on Spelling and Writing. Each class began with a demonstration of the main activity by the facilitator. The DAS teachers had been using the usual “phonic” method to teach reading and it was not working for most of the children. Sudeshna introduced the “whole word approach”. After 5 reading classes, the trainees started giving demonstration from the 6th class. It was found that 6-7 of the trainees were making mistakes and were not following the steps properly which Sudeshna had thought was quite easy to follow. So she again gave some demonstrations and the next time when the trainees volunteered to show, their performance was better. However at the end of the 16 day training, many teachers said they were still unsure about the reading. So follow up is required. ***On hindsight Sudeshna feels that training should have included demonstration classes with children. That would also have given us a better idea of the actual ground reality. There were constraints --- the DAS training room was very small; their “centres” are spread over a wide area in Eastern Kolkata; the teachers come from different locations etc. And yet this taking of actual classes as part of training has to be kept in mind for the future.***

Almost all the teachers picked up the Writing part very well. This included making small stories, write-ups, writing in response to music/piece of art, venn diagrams, categorization, making charts etc. Teachers also learnt to produce good open ended worksheets on a particular theme or issue. The participants were quite enthusiastic about making materials. So now they have a pool of materials made during this training which all the DAS centres can borrow from.

The teachers of DAS would complain time and again that they have received many trainings from various sources and are not sure when and where to use which method and material. So on the last day Sudeshna suggested that the DAS teachers should sit together with all their materials and techniques which they have learnt in various trainings and through mutual discussions find out where which has been most effective. During the training the trainees also came up with various problems about the day-to-day running of their classes. But it also turned out that the group dynamics among the trainees was quite terrible. This led Sudeshna to discuss, in almost every training day, various class-management methods and values so necessary for cooperative learning.

On the last day Sudeshna divided the 16 day training into 17 components and gave each trainee a slip of paper with a particular component. She gave them 10 minutes to think and then each had to make a presentation. That turned out to be quite excellent and was a summary of the whole training, specially for the DAS authorities who were present, for the teachers themselves, and also for Sudeshna.

The previous day Sudeshna and Biswajit had created a book with one composition of each of the 17 trainees and they were quite thrilled to receive this compiled book. The teachers of DAS also indicated that none of their previous trainings were so interactive and participatory.

***As far as Shikshamitra is concerned, with our own school and various activities and very few full timers, we would prefer not to conduct such long drawn out ( 16 days over two months ) trainings in future.***

## **Case Study 6: SOMETHING DIFFERENT: An exhibition of “Art in School ” at SHIKSHAMITRA**

**12, 13, 14 Dec, 2008**

We had dreamt about this exhibition for a long time , to be held in our school or in the neighborhood for parents , friends, well wishers , other teachers, and anyone else interested to see something different. We wanted to show that at Shikshamitra ---drawing , painting , sewing , stitching , clay work, book binding , various other crafts, watching “art” , listening to music ,singing , theatre , dancing, watching and analyzing films was part of our daily classes . Art was everywhere, all the time, with any subject. And it involved the maximum recycling of used and waste materials.

Eventually it was decided that it would be held on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> December ( Friday & Saturday) in the school. For two weeks all the teachers and students, and specially Sudeshna and Maura, were extremely busy, selecting pieces from the last three and half years of work, writing labels, thinking how – what – where to display. Some walls had to be painted. Invitation letter and envelope designed by students from used brochures and both hard and soft copies mailed out; numerous phone calls made .Most of the preparations were done while normal school was going on. The last two days -- 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Dec were really hectic as teachers and students did the final selections and Maura started putting into effect what was till then in her head only . There was also some “damage” as Biswajit stepped on Sipra’s toe in the ensuing melee and it actually broke! Sipra cried as she could not attend the exhibition. Students did some last minute “touching up”; teachers designed a bilingual leaflet. It was touch and go as displays were finally completed at 8:45 pm on the 11<sup>th</sup> in all the 5 rooms; duties were assigned to students and teachers; and everyone went home excited and tired.

For inauguration we had invited the local Ward Commissioner Bobby Hakim of Chetla . Instead of the usual flowers , singing , lighting of lamp, cutting the string--- we first asked him to see the whole school and then he was taken aback when we asked him to do some drawing on a piece of paper . He drew up the figure of a man holding aloft the Indian flag and wrote “We are all equal”. Seeing this, our student Shajahan cheekily whispered “this is not right; one has to add “un” before equal”!! This set the tone of the exhibition as most visitors in the next 3 days were surprised at the originality of Shikshamitra children’s comments, stories, compositions, drawing etc. Mr. Hakim also mentioned that he would like to see if Shikshamitra’s talents and expertise could be utilized in the govt schools of the ward. Something for us to follow up!!

On display were prose and drawing-painting corresponding to (1) the song “gharer bhetore ghar “a mystical song by the group Mokaam. (2) the story of a fight between moon and the sun (3) the Maori film “Whale rider “ (4) chart showing how to do various kinds of book binding (5) lovely diaries with coloured covers of various sizes made by the book binding group ( More than Rs.1000 worth of diaries were sold ) (6) vibrant paper masks made from paper pulp (7) two lovely posters (with photos of masks) which we have printed and are selling as teaching learning material ;one has a comment by Picasso and another has a wonderful tale in English and Bengali (student Anita’s version). ( 8) creative maths activities (9) colourful time line of her own life by a student (10) a book on the history of the school’s neighbourhood ( Chetla ) written by the senior students and their teacher Sandip Bandopadhyay and now being used as a guiding text by other students (11) Art Switch – a colourful square sheet made together by many children using pencil , paint , interesting waste materials (12) Children’s own English story book made after listening to Red Riding Hood , re-writing in own words, typing and printing out from computer , pasting the lines and making own illustrations (13) Bengali story books where children have written and stored their own book “reviews” in flaps made into the inside of the cover (14 ) Bengali versions of English stories which the teacher had narrated in class ( 15 ) A précis of the story of the film “Children of Heaven” made by the whole class together and then each child’s illustration of the story (16) Tagore’s “katakuti”(lovely designs made by joining the cutting or corrections while composing a poem ) and children’s own such katakuti ( 17) children’s drawings and comments on how they perceive Tagore’s activities and predicament. (18) clay ornaments made by the children (19) a lovely drawing based on Kabir Suman’s song “ ekii thalae charte ruti” on how war declared by leaders forces neighboring friends to shoot and kill each other. (20) reports written by senior students in English on a visit to a local kiln and on the visit by a doctor to Shikshamitra (21) chart showing the various uses of

maps (22) Various quotes of children matching with pictures drawn and painted by them (23) one of the most attractive things right at the entrance of the school was the big board with children's quotes on the relevance of art in school .

There were several other such items .

There were also two activity corners. In one room visitors, inspired by the exhibition, were free to do their own drawing/painting. Many parents participated in this . In another corner people could throw a colour dipped ball at a paper with a human outline pasted on a wall to "paint" this picture !! New ones were put up as soon as one outline was full of colour. Not just children ( many friends of our students had come ) , but many adult visitors thoroughly enjoyed this.

The children also put up 5-6 minute performances of two dances and a small skit several times on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> when there were a bunch of visitors. In our library Malasree, Nandita and Poonam were in charge of selling Shikshamitra products. In the staff room Sujata and student Dolly were in charge of serving tea and cakes/biscuits supplied by Maura . Biswajit , Sudeshna and Maura were all over the place. Payel was welcoming the visitors and getting their comments ; Maushumi looked after the kitchen and did the local invitations.

The exhibitions were open from 3pm till 7 pm on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> . There was an announcement in "The Telegraph" on 11<sup>th</sup> 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and several people came after seeing this in the newspaper. On 13<sup>th</sup> many visitors started calling up their friends asking them to come and then they started requesting Sudeshna to keep it open on Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup> also. Although the teachers were exhausted (the students as usual were quite willing) . So 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday the exhibition was open from 2 – 6 pm. And now some more people want to see . Therefore the exhibits will remain on display through this week till Friday the 19<sup>th</sup> Dec .

In most cases it was the students on duty in various rooms who explained to all the visitors .And apart from the usual "good" performers , the normally reticent girls also did a marvelous job in explaining their work. It was the teachers from other schools and organizations who were the most excited . Kirsty and her teachers from Suchana school of Santiniketan took detailed notes. Alokendra from Shamil detained us till the end and had to be pushed out at 7 pm on Sunday ! Education researcher Manabi Majumdar from the CSSSC spent a lot of time and said she would write notes after going home. Swati of Learning Network came on first day and sent her mother and others on Saturday. Professor Subhendu Dasgupta not only read and spoke to the children in great detail , but also pointed to other visitors what to look for and what to read. Senior teacher Madhuchanda from Future Foundation ( one of Kolkata 's leading innovative school) was amazed at the quality and diversity of work and also the creativity of teachers and said that even in her school this kind of commitment and output was not possible. Our friend Soumya Chakraborty was firmly guided by little Pradeep Giri to the "drawing room" and when Soumya playfully asked what would he gain by drawing , Pradip after a few seconds replied that "you will get back to your childhood". Shravan of AID –Austin landed up and after seeing everything in detail said that he might come again to buy the greeting cards made by the children . Laltu , visiting from Hyderabad , dropped in on the first day and gave many pointers ( he has been associated for many years with Eklavya and other such creative children's ventures ). Many people wanted a copy of the book "A History of Chetla" . Zul Kalam of Swanirvar rural came and wanted this exhibition to be taken to the village. To this our student Shajahan commented that this will not be effective as it will needlessly produce jealousy. Instead Shikshamitra teachers and students should hold a two day workshop for rural teachers and students to come up with somewhat similar outputs and at the end there should be a exhibition of those outputs !! Our first art teacher Atreyee , who now lives in Pune , dropped in briefly . So did ex teacher Ankur with some friends and next day he sent some others. Police Divisional Commissioner of South Kolkata Mr. Subbarao spent quite some time . The local Police Station Officer in charge also came in at the same time ( coincidentally) . So did our house owner Arup Mitra ( professor in St.Xaviers College ) and his wife who offered to teach activity oriented Botany and Zoology to the children. Maura's husband Gautam came and entertained the children with small magic items . Anshuman and Malini were so happy that they called and asked DRCSC staff to come immediately. There were many other visitors and some of the exchanges were quite interesting.

Our film teacher Moupia and her filmmaker husband Shankho have taken many still and video pictures and we will soon make suitable “docu-materials”. Many persons have asked us to quickly come up with “books” assembling all this work showing the detailed process and outputs for the benefit of other teachers on how to do integrated teaching of “subjects and art”.

### **Case Study 7: “ART IN SCHOOL” EXHIBITION IN THE COMMUNITY, 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan, 2009**

It was Sukhendu’s (one of our founding teacher cum social worker) dream to take Shikshamitra into the community by holding an interactive exhibition in the local club. Unfortunately, in 2006 we got involved in holding the huge “bal vividha” festival and community exhibition had to be postponed. Last month (12-14 December 2008) after holding the highly successful exhibition in the school, we discussed with Kishore, the secretary of Alipore Junior Sporting Club (AJS Club) and the parents; and everyone was very enthusiastic about such an event in their locality. As the exhibits were already with us, this was also the right time. So this became a joint venture of Shikshamitra and A.J.S. Club. The venue was the club courtyard. The community was notified through 6 posters hung at strategic points in and around the locality. Mousumi, our current social worker (she is also Sukhendu’s wife), was in charge along with Sipra and Biswajit.

On 19<sup>th</sup> January parents were invited for a creative session in the school. They drew, they painted, made attractive needle work pieces, and tried their hands at clay work. As they munched at their snacks and sipped the tea, the initial nervousness vanished. Soon they giggled and commented on each other’s work. Maura, our art teacher, was approached and mothers requested her to take English classes for them! A reluctant and the only father in the group made a drawing- perhaps the first after he had finished his schooling. All of these were also displayed at the exhibition and the mothers managed their exhibits. 23<sup>rd</sup> January- By 8:30 a.m. everybody had assembled in the school. Ador, our school student, came with his rickshaw van and took all the exhibits to the venue. It was a great feeling to go together as a Shikshamitra team and start the preparations. Unfortunately the previous day 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan was a Bandh and on 20<sup>th</sup> we had a serious discussion about canceling the exhibition. But thanks to Kishore, the ever enterprising club Secretary (supporting us from the beginning) and the decorator Sachin, the entire zone was cordoned off neatly on 23<sup>rd</sup> morning and was ready for us to work on the displays.

To our surprise, Bijoy Das (an ex-student who lasted six months) and Biswajit Das (a ragpicker who lasted 2 days) were the main people sweeping the premises. Biswajit even reminded me that he was one of the first students at Shikshamitra.

- It just took us (6 teachers and 8 students) 2.5 hours to finish putting up the displays; and an hour more was spent in detailing and giving technical touches. A wonderful synchronized team work.
- It was so different in the community- where we the teachers of Shikshamitra were the outsiders. The insiders were our student community, their mothers, Kishore and his associates from the club. We were comfortably assisting them to make the show a success. They knew every nook and corner and were climbing and crouching everywhere to make the place look the very best. We tried our very best to sense the pulse of the community- adding exhibits or canceling some.
- The program was stipulated to start at 2 p.m. We found that we had started already a couple of hours before! In a happening community one cannot restrict children and adults. They just walk in!
- Since the morning, adults and children queried about the sit and draw- to which they were very familiar. We warned them that there will be no prizes and everyone is a winner. Groups of children in all sizes put colour and drew to their hearts’ content with family members and friends urging them to do well. The show was manned by Samrat and Boloram and teachers Biswajit and Mousumi. Simultaneously children thronged together to shape things out of clay. It was contagious. Adults, men and women tried their hand at clay work and some of their pieces were pretty original. Mohon, Shantanu and Shiladitya supervised.
- However the show was stolen by the enthusiastic young readers. They were glued to our “library books” which we had displayed. Colourful books with 2-4 lines per page were chosen on purpose. More difficult ones were also there. The sheer colour and simplicity of these books stole the young

hearts. The attraction was that they could read easily, loudly and move on to the next one quickly. A small child (4/5 years) simply hugged a book, feeling it again and then smelling the book too!! Older children (13/14) also refused to leave the books. Children rushed in, dragging their parents and grandparents along. They had come with money. They wanted to buy the books. How dismayed they were when we told them that these were our library book and were not for sale! We all knew what the next step would be----- starting a weekly library in the club premises!

Many enquired about the school, as they gazed into the charts. Volunteers like Shantanu, Sajahan, Ador, Rohit and even little Neha did a great job managing the people, especially the children.

Photographs displayed (from our interesting science classes and our vibrant E.V.E. classes within the school) drew many visitors. It was a learning experience for us. A community exhibition needs more hands on displays, many more photographs and less writing material.

Shikshamitra put up a mime show, dance performance and storytelling at the end of the show- compered by Bickey from our topmost class.

It took us just about half an hour to dismantle the show – teamwork at its best. By 6:30 pm we were back to the school with everything. Enjoying the evening snack we called it a day by 7:15 pm --- a super success by all means .

### **Case Study 8: A different Mothers' Meeting**

We have been having parents ( mostly mothers ) meetings in the school and in the community . It is mostly talking and discussing . Some of the mothers are vocal , some are not . We have also had children displaying and explaining their work to their mothers in one of the meetings . Sometimes we have pro-actively asked whether we can do something for them and there havnt been too many concrete suggestions.

With our new social worker Mousumi Santra who has developed very good rapport with the mothers, we decided to do something quite different . On 20th November during mothers meet she declared that today we are going to have fun ! So instead of discussing serious issues the day started with a game of Musical Chairs. Mousumi and Nandita of Shikshamitra joined the parents in the game. Initially the parents were hesitant. But after the first few rounds the room was filled with laughter and merriment. Mohan's mother was the proud winner of the game. Chocolates were distributed to all of them as their prize. By the time the second game started – passing the ring through a pencil held tightly between the lips—the mothers had managed to shed their inhibitions completely .

The mothers were extremely happy. While one said that she went back to her childhood days, another said that the work pressure makes them forget that they can have fun too. When the mothers were asked to comment about the school, they said that Shikshamitra is different from other schools – the children learn good English; there is lots of art-work; the school looks after the well being of the children; staff visit their homes; and they hoped that in future it will do even better. Sajahan's mother reported that if they ever mention the topic of shifting him to another school, Sajahan protests by saying that he will discontinue his studies if he is withdrawn from this school. Mohan's mother mentioned his problems (mild learning disability) and said that in the previous school Mohan was always looking for excuses to bunk school, but now he comes to Shikshamitra willingly, and has shown considerable improvement.

The climax was at the end. The mothers said that they would like to dance by themselves as this is something which they are “not supposed” to do after marriage . So they asked the teachers to leave the room, they shut the door, put on some music and had a gala time dancing to their heart's content and later also inviting Mousumi to join them.

What a Mothers meeting ! Enough to scandalise most men and “serious” people !!