

Shikshamitra Annual Report 2012-13

2012-13 – A year of Dissemination, Introspection and In-depth Planning for the Future

2011-12 had been a year of adjustment (the school having closed), building up and preparing in the role of orienters and facilitators in teacher education and development of appropriate materials according to the need.

2012-13 saw us doing more and more of the above. As we bettered ourselves in certain areas, we also realized where we needed to improve or what we should not do at all.

We looked at each of us in Shikshamitra, at each of our personal aspirations and goals along with the strengths and weaknesses and tried to realize how that matched with the organizational objectives. This made things clearer for all of us as to where we stand with respect to the organization and its future. The process was difficult, not very smooth at all.

This helped us to choose the path we should take from 2013 and were able to write up our proposals for the coming year.

😊 Highlights:

- [Bangla program in govt high schools with Swanirvar](#)
- [Library initiatives](#)
- Galpo Niye gaining popularity
- Materials and kits ready for dissemination (in Bangla, English and maths)
- [Consultations beyond subjects \(e.g. Bangla, English and maths\)](#)
- [Opportunity to work with D.El.Ed students \(maths\) in DIET Nadia](#)



☹ Lowlight:

- No luck in finding suitable premises – Shikshamitra is finding it very difficult to find larger premises as people do not want to rent out their houses to an organization suspecting political link.

Rabindra Mukta Vidyalaya (RMV): Shikshamitra students had taken their Madhyamik exam through RMV, the open school board in WB. Dinesh continued and cleared all subjects except math. Hasna has appeared for all except English and is currently awaiting her results. Noor and Ador have discontinued, though Ador might take his remaining 3 subjects in future.

Library and Other Support Programs: Libraries or “Spaces of their Own” for children (7-15 yrs) – began with reading books and developed as activity centers nurturing creativity and self exploration beyond the routine textbook-tuition-exam cycle. They are very much like Shikshamitra in spirit.

Sajahan along with Hasna (both ex students of Shikshamitra) completed 1½ years with their Little Library in Mar 2013. They themselves are however finding it tough to run the show due to personal commitments. Despite the difficulties, *an initiative taken by Sajahan to spot 4-5 boys (9-11 yrs), who had difficulties in learning and were staying outside their regular schools. Shikshamitra teachers did a basal assessment and arranged for a bi-weekly intervention for them at Shikshamitra. Interestingly these children were not keen on doing Bangla or maths in fun way. The attractions on the lanes and by-lanes of Chelta were as usual far stronger! Moreover, there wasn't anyone responsible to see that they came regularly at a specific time. They keep dropping in (brining in raw mangoes, tamarind) to try their hands at craft, glance at books and chat freely – all for a very short while.*

Our own librarian, Mahua's effort at her residence resulted in a library, i.e. a gathering of 5-6 adolescents from the neighborhood, every Friday. Christened as Friends' Library, an array of activities take place here, using a number of ideas and materials from Shikshamitra. The Shikshamitra people have also taken

sessions, using our materials and concepts. The group of youngsters, have learnt to think out of the box, to talk about themselves, listen to others, to help and also 'resist' helping friends as a process of learning. Mahua's daughter is a regular participant. So is a young member's mother. *Interestingly, young boys / girls from the neighborhood come to find out what actually is happening on Fridays!* Mahua feels quite confident and better as a facilitator, looking back at herself in 2005 when she 1st joined Shikshamitra as a science teacher and a librarian.

Maura Hurley, the creative inspiration of Shikshamitra, has been running her own Sunday library, Mustard Seeds for over 10 years in her drawing room. Experimenting with reading, creativity and eco-friendly activities – inside and outside the house, Maura has been trying a lot of materials and ideas from Shikshamitra. Shikshamitra personnel, both teachers and students once again have visited the library to share their expertise. *Rohit, an extremely talented student of Shikshamitra, now working as a 'mistri' in building construction, took a session on hip-hop dance at Mustard Seeds, enthraling the young ones! "I feel like Rohit, after a long time", he mused at the end of the day.*

In future, Shikshamitra seems to spread through similar informal ventures and even in formal forms (in library classes of different schools).

Working with Govt High Schools in N 24 Pgns through Swanirvar (2009-2013): Work started way back in 2009. Heads of 10-12 govt high schools had approached Swanirvar, asking for assistance in English and maths. Suggestions were made to start with Bangla, as that was the medium of reading and writing for all subjects. It was ignored barring one HM (of Mandra Hazer Ali High School), who later invited Shikshamitra to help in providing a foundation in Bangla for Class V students (Feb-Apr 2011).

Our idea was to gather the interested teachers of middle school maths and English, discuss the problems faced and help them to look for answers. Learning would happen through workshops. It was also aimed that a network of teachers would emerge and later new learning and sharing would happen through it.

Maths – School teachers worked together over a year through a number of workshops. Teachers in schools were motivated to try different maths exercises in the classroom. They applied concepts of geometry through innovative 3D models and participate in the school exhibitions along with their students. Some of the teachers developed as resource teachers.

English – A bridge course to equip the children of Classes V-VI in Basic English was introduced over a period of 2 years for 2 batches of teachers. A set of 10 teachers attended the workshop and orientation program. Most did not continue work in their school. 3 teachers worked well in their schools and have emerged as good resource teachers of that area. An advanced course also prepared teachers (only 6 were interested) to teach an English text and work on creative writing.

In Jan 2012, Swanirvar invited the heads and secretaries of schools of that area, along with an exhibition of the TLMs in English and maths – made and used by the teachers, who were oriented in 2009-11. The same teachers addressed the audience narrating their class experiences and the effect of workshop exposures.



After the exhibition more HMs showed interest in **Bangla**. Following an orientation in the Bangla program, a 3-day workshop was held on 3-5 Jan, 2013. The orientation and workshop was attended by teachers from 14 schools of the area. 4 Swanirvar personnel from KKB department also attended. They were to become the future facilitators in Bangla. The workshop was successful and the teachers returned motivated.

A decision was taken in Feb 2013 that a thorough and continuous follow up will have to be planned, before the teachers give in to the everyday routine and drudgery. Thanks to Swanirvar KKB supervisor, the KKB facilitators and the Bangla program facilitator of Shikshamitra, for regular visits, handholding and persuasion in schools (12 out of 14, 2 schools were not interested). It is yielding very good results. The

HMs are to be thanked deeply for their continuous support. The handholding will continue till Apr 2013, by which time the effects can be seen.

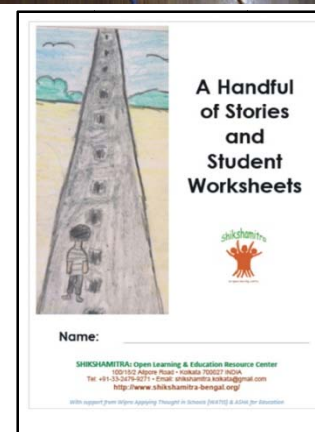
Production and Publications: Galpo Niye (the Bangla story cards) found its way into many homes, schools, teacher education institutes as gifts, library material, TLM and therapeutic tool since Jun 2012. Apart from these cards some maths materials are also becoming popular. These include (i) several sets domino cards to master whole numbers, decimals, fractions and integers and (ii) 3 sets of cards for multiplication tables.

Right now we are busy with making materials so that we have a minimum stock of at least 5-10 sets of each.

In addition, the following will be ready for printing by end of Mar –



- i. a booklet with English stories and related worksheets
- ii. a handbook for teachers: a guide to teach reading and writing to reluctant 1st generation school goers some of whom have difficulty with language



Consultations beyond Subjects:

Mahila Seva Samiti (MSS): Justice Ruma Pal, the patron and secretary of MSS (Sonarpur, S 24 Pgns) had been the chief person to arrange for our visit to MSS followed by a workshop for the caregivers of that home. The teachers and other caregivers had used some of the exercises learnt at the workshop. However we did not hear much since then.

Justice Pal has been in touch and at a personal level is trying to deal with difficulties faced by some girls and counseling them. And each time she had consulted and discussed with the coordinator of Shikshamitra, about the individual problems. Shikshamitra is serving as a consultant in management of the home, the inmates, suggesting ways and programs to deal with them.



Anjali is an NGO working in the area of mental health.

It has been collaborating with the state govt to provide care and necessary inputs in few govt run mental hospitals. A weekly program for the inmates of 2 hospitals is being coordinated and conducted by a highly motivated facilitator since 2012. Shikshamitra was approached by Anjali to help the facilitator in improving her sessions. She learnt to plan and use appropriate Shikshamitra materials and activities in her sessions. After giving inputs for 4 months (Jun-Oct) the Shikshamitra coordinator visited one such hospital session. The excerpt below is from her visit report:

Sunshine within the Walls

I went to Lumbini Hospital on the afternoon of 22nd November 2012 with Krishna. I wished to attend her session. As I walked into the bleak, dusty hall on the first floor, the first student to greet us at the office was Meeradi. Many others came in to greet Krishna. I was introduced to them.

Soon we moved to the far end of the hall, where the 'students' had laid the mats and seated themselves neatly. They were waiting for the show to begin. Like in any classroom, there were a few still moving about.

The session began. Soon Krishna was singing a song to them 'aha ki ananda akashey batashey' Many of them joined. They sang beautifully. The song was closely followed by the story Ugly Duckling - a short and crisp narration. However the 'dark and ugly duckling must have evoked compassion and some sort of identification. Meeradi was quick to ask a question as soon as the story ended. "How did the dark and ugly duckling become fair and beautiful?" (I do have personal reservation about the use of words 'darks' and 'fair') Can someone dark become fair someday? - Meeradi stressed. Replies poured in.

"The duckling was unloved for such a long time. So she remained dark and sad."

"Nobody took care of her. She had gathered dirt. The swans gave her a scrub, took care of her. So she turned fair and beautiful," said quite a few. I felt they had identified with the duckling. They longed to be cleaned, bathed, groomed and adorned. They, like the duckling felt rejected, forgotten, living in the obscurity of a hospital. Krishna made a great connection too! She felt that the duckling glowed and looked beautiful with the love she received from the swans. "Like the song we sung," she said, "aha ki ananda"

Other activities followed. It was loose and most participated, while some remained half alert. The session ended with a dance performance by 3 sisters while the others sang. The entire session spelt out whole lot of positivity, hope and possibilities. Credit must go to Krishna, Anjali and all those who are connected with the program. Shikshamitra ideas and concepts can make a difference - can really reach out.



Trainings and Interventions:

Marfat: After the success of the Accelerated Bangla program with the working girls, the 2nd venture, started in Mar 2012, was with the students of Classes III-IV in Bangla and math. Marfat found this to be a successful intervention. We are waiting for the final evaluation in beginning of Apr.



Mukti: We completed 2nd and 3rd Phase of training in English and math for 24 Mukti teachers in 8 centers. There 2 follow ups as well. We could not squeeze in the final evaluation as things got delayed and there was no more time in 2012. We are hoping to do a visit regarding that this year. According to the organization, this intervention has brought significant change in the way they teach. However it will take some time to get completely familiar with these new ways of teaching English and math.

Parichiti: We had another art series with the girls of Parichiti in Feb-Jul 2012. Like Snegam, it was a series of 10 classes culminating in an exhibition. Sajahan was Maura's steady assistant in these sessions.

Tomorrow's Foundation: In May 2012 we conducted a 2-day teaser workshop to show case how classes happen at Shikshamitra with 2 sets of children in TF followed by a discussion with the teachers there. But there was no response after that and we came to know that the key person, who had invited us, had resigned from the organization.

Suchana: After the Jan workshop on primary math it was now time for the middle school level with a lot of our materials in Sep 2012. We started with fractions and decimals including recurring decimals and approximation (rounding off), integers and ended with algebra and geometry. There were 2 demo classes with students of Classes V-VI on addition-subtraction of fractions and multiplication of integers. The

highlight of this workshop was the teachers. They not only knew exactly where they lack understanding but also were determined to learn. They pushed us to work out complex examples to make sure our methods work for every possible situation. This helped us explore further as well. In addition, the ppts on various topics in mathematics became popular. In general our materials sparked a lot of interest in how they were created using various softwares. So break times were utilized for these.

Khelaghar: Initially in Feb 2012, Khelaghar a well known home for orphaned and poor children (5-16 yrs) had approached Shikshamitra to modify and create an inclusive time table. They wanted to make room for various activities outside the usual classroom transactions; hence, the interactions. Next was a request to share the Shikshamitra Bangla program in creativity.

In Sep 2012, a daylong workshop took place at Khelaghar for 12 teachers from 3 different institutions including 4 from the host organization. A follow up after 2 months revealed that the program seemed to have been best implemented here.

In Feb 2013, a visit was made to Khelaghar (a) to take games and outdoor activity sessions with the children and (b) to talk with the Bangla teacher, who had been using Galpo Niye cards and doing other activities in different classes (II-VII). It was heartening to see her using these cards in different ways according to the class levels.

Development Action Society (DAS): Shikshamitra began its journey in teacher orientation with DAS in 2007. Few orientations followed intermittently (2007-09). In 2012, DAS asked us for a full orientation in functional literacy, for the facilitators who looked after the SHGs. Since we do not have a complete answer to this program, we had refused profusely. However in Jan 2013, we were literally cajoled into such a capacity building program for 3 days in Bangla and maths. It really was not a functional literacy program as the term denotes. Finding it useful in some of the centers, DAS bought more sets in Bangla to extend its work in other centers.

Towards Future: This organization had approached us for training and other inputs. After a visit and a thorough discussion with the teachers we felt that Swanirvar will meet their needs in a better way. So this has been delegated out to Swanirvar.

Sujata Devi Vidya Mandir: This govt high school in Kolkata approached us for help in 2012. After a visit to the school and a discussion with the teachers, we conducted a baseline in Bangla, English and maths for Class V and shared our finding with the teachers in Feb 2013. We had a workshop on maths in Mar and the language ones will be held in Apr.

Shamayita: We also visited the CBSE school run by this organization in Bankura. Further work is in the pipeline.

Invited Workshops on Maths

We were invited for a number of workshops with children by several organizations.

ALM: Two 2-day workshops in summer 2012 – (i) fractions with Class V and (ii) graphs with Class IX-X

Bose Institute: 3-day workshop with 24 Class IX-XII students from 7 sister states and Darjeeling (May 2012)

JBNSTS: 2 workshops with ~70 Class VIII students each in Kanthi (Aug 2012) and Purulia (Jan 2013) plus conducting a math corner with selected students from several districts

Patha Bhavana, Shantiniketan: ½ day workshop with ~60 Class VI students on integers and other topics (Feb 2013)

These helped us on one side to fill the void of not having regular student interactions and on the other to develop modules on various topics appropriate for different classes and at different times of the year. Our colorful and hands on math activities have been successful in engaging teachers and other resource persons as well.

DIET Nadia: In addition to above, we got a unique opportunity to work with 2 batches of D.El.Ed. students at DIET Nadia in Dec 2012 and in Feb 2013. The focus was to expose these students to learning-teaching materials in math. This included not only demonstrations but also how to make them from things available in the local market. One of the highlights was shopping at a wide range of stores for various



raw materials and then the actual creation of learning aids.

It was heartwarming to see how much the students retained. Given a topic, they knew which materials can be used and which will not help. We also used the new textbooks and got ourselves thoroughly familiarized with them. The students showed great teamwork and owned material making in the Feb workshop.



The invited workshops also provided an opportunity to promote our materials to a wider audience of students, teachers and would-be teachers.

Praajak: After the 2009-10 intervention for the education program at the Drop In Centers (DIC) in Malda and Asansol, there were some clear improvement among the boys. So Praajak requested us to conduct a social audit the education program at these 2 DICs. Our visit in May 2012 revealed that boys from Malda and Asansol stand apart from the remaining DIC kids thanks to their attitude and behavior – something that no one in Praajak dared to dream of in 2009. The presence of a designated teacher had clearly made a difference.

The coordinator of a platform program from a different organization, unaware of Shikshamitra's intervention, also found the Malda DIC to be vastly different from many other DICs. According to him, the place was welcoming, the boys had strong ownership of it and took good care of the premises and the education program was the best.

S24Pgn SI: This venture did not work out due to lack of time and coordination between the DI and the DIET principal.

Meeting Pratham: Much of our work on accelerated reading and writing has been inspired by Prof. Jalaluddin, who has helped Pratham build the same program. On interacting with Dr. Rukmini Banerjee of Pratham at the WATIS meeting, we identified common grounds of working on language – reading, writing and dissemination through publications. We invited Pratham on 31 Jan 2013 to share our ideas and to know more about their reading and writing in Bengali, in West Bengal, and to locate possibilities of working together here, in future.



New recruit:

Proma Basu Roy (MA in Education, TISS) joined in Jan 2013 for 6 months. She will (i) develop and conduct a foundation course in language theories for trainers in Bangla and (ii) a) help out with streamlining the training program, b) planning the future interactive center

Aditi Majumdar (English trainer from Vidya Bhavan, Udaipur) is to join from June 2013. She will confirm by this month.

Syllabus Committee and New Textbooks: We had attended few meetings of the Syllabus Committee while they were working on the draft curriculum and syllabus (subject-wise) as well as when they started writing the textbooks. We had given concrete feedback on the draft and later specific comments on some of the textbooks. We are glad to know that our feedback got discussed by the committee.

We also attended a workshop on CCE and the new textbooks with high schools teachers in N 24 Pgns. [We have been working with such teachers in Bangla, English and math since 2009 with Swanirvar's help.] The discussion was healthy and the teachers were substantiating their points with examples. They were there to explore ways to incorporate the recent changes in the education system.

This experience was however contrary to the general feedback from such workshops across West Bengal and it led us to some reflections.

- *The discussion in Bangla, English and math went well.*
- *The participating schools came from an area where Swanirvar works.*
- *Shikshamitra had provided input on each of these 3 subjects to teachers in that area through Swanirvar.*
- *So a number of teachers in each subject knew of ways to facilitate the changes in the education system.*
- *During discussions, as they shared or voiced their opinions, their focus was to get the best out of the workshop and this was irrespective of the capability of the resource person in charge.*

Similar workshops were held in other places. The teachers could not take advantage of theme. Is it because they had not received any exposure to different ways and had never had a chance to think outside the box?

Going Forward:

We have always imagined education to be a kind of growth that happens by identifying ourselves as independent, emotional and thinking individuals with the world around us, so much so that we tried to keep this as the philosophy of our school. We began an open learning center in 2005 with an experimental school and an education resource center complementing each other. 2005-11, the school occupied the center stage while the resource center functioned in parts. 2011 saw the closure of the school and the resource wing became our main focus. Some of our learning and experiences from the school started finding their ways through our teacher education programs. Deep in our hearts however we continued to be dejected that our efforts to build the world with beautiful minds have been terminated.

Now, after months of thinking, we have again decided to work towards building a space where children, teachers and parents will learn and grow together. Our focus will be on 'language' to start with. We wish to build a library, which will operate as a space for many interactions, sharing, doing, learning, and borrowing a book along side. This will also be a resource for teachers. We have in these many years (2007-13) formed good relationship with many teachers or education associates. We feel, now is the right time to invite them to use the resource center. Since we would like to have children from diverse backgrounds, our plan is to extend our library - take our language programs to children who may not be able to physically come over to our space. Parallel to this, we hope to build on our publication - writings for children, teachers, parents and other practitioners of education, documentations, magazines and more. We realize that there is much that we ourselves have learned from our school which we would like to share with people. In this new venture we intend to retain the approach, only, the nature shifts from a school to an interactive space. We are very excited and looking forward.

