

## Shikshamitra – Annual Update, 2014-15

Shikshamitra is an open learning space and a resource center for children, teachers, parents and education practitioners, primarily focusing on the age group of 8 to 15 years. The organization began as a school in 2005, catering to the first generation school goers, and also as a resource center (books, films, teaching-learning material, teacher trainings, and information center). It was an experimental school, trying out different curriculum and a different syllabus for different learners using different methods, instead of one syllabus and the same method for all. In 2011, the school closed down. Thereafter, it took shape of an organization and moved into teacher education, popularizing specific programmes like library, language, mathematics and art; the focus was also on developing teaching-learning materials.

### ***Our Philosophy:***

*Shikshamitra is a process of learning to live better. It is a space where one learns to keep well and help others keep well too.*

*Shikshamitra has an address. However it goes beyond and permeates into the lives of many, influencing ones choices in life and ways of life.*

*To be associated with Shikshamitra is to assume the responsibility of trying and living better.*

*It is a continuous attempt to search for activities that inspire life and build trust or is an attempt to keep away from anything that is on the contrary.*

*It is the means to be aware of how much one can achieve and to know exactly what ones limitations are.*

### **Things we want to do and achieve through our programmes:**

- 1) To address issues of literacy and learning, focusing on classroom practices of reading and writing and basic mathematics.
  - *Along with our trainings, we have also received an opportunity to develop a module for in-service teachers at Modern Academy of Continuing Education (MACE), Kolkata. We are beginning with mathematics. The module will focus on hands-on practices of middle school mathematics, connecting theoretical understandings.*

- *Also, funding agencies – Sahay and Save the Children have acknowledged the need for this and have requested us for training of their partner organizations.*
- 2) To deconstruct the conventional notion of ‘reading’; advocating the holistic role in the school curriculum and in education at large.
- *In our trainings, we meticulously try to incorporate reading multiple objects – art and craft, people, objects and situations as ‘texts’ and constructing knowledge around them, through discussions, interactions and graphical representation.*
  - *Teachers address reading skill to help children read mathematics. For instance, to understand ‘bisection’, primarily to go about the manner of understanding the word.*
- 3) Helping teachers and parents look at subjects and textbooks through reading and language instead of treating language learning in isolation, or limiting it to only literature.
- *Two parents, whose children come to Shikshamitra Library, came up with a problem that their children find it difficult in approaching problem sums. This was then addressed through a simple reading workshop, which provided the reading skill, hence enabled ‘reading’ within any subject.*
- 4) Providing access for teachers to books, material and other pedagogical support.
- *Ongoing access has been provided to parents, MACE, schools (private and government), and organizations.*
- 5) This space intends to be a forum for teachers to meet, for a diverse community of teachers to bring their experiences together, which is likely to help them in dealing with their classes.
- *This is just beginning. A private school in Kolkata approached for this sharing and has taken the onus to be instrumental in inviting teachers from other schools.*
- 6) The Right to Education Act, 2009, had recommended that libraries are mandatory in every school. At present the libraries (in most cases) are a cupboard, kept under lock and key. A focus of our work would be to help schools set up a library and include its programmes in the classroom.
- *We have more children and interested parents using the library as an open learning space.*
  - *Praajak took our library training and the impact has been that a government school and an education center have begun steering their respective libraries beyond cupboards and bookshelves. Some are yet to begin though.*

7) To contribute to contemporary Bengali texts through our publication.

- *Publication took off last year. It is in progress. We are happy to finally find a suitable person to steer this forward.*

**2014-15 was yet another busy year. Briefly, this is how it looked:**

### **Teacher Education and trainings**

	<b>Bengali</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Art</b>	<b>Class Management</b>	<b>Library orientation</b>
Government	32		11			
Non-govt.	95	64	90		21	20
Children				95		110
Mothers			3			

\*the figures denote the total number of teachers who have received our training over 2014-15

The funding agencies, Save the Children and Sahay Child International, approached Shikshamitra for teacher education programmes for their partner organizations. Mathematics and Bangla were the subjects that needed attention. Class management assessment was the other areas covered. Sahay Child International was the first organization to ask for extensive and comprehensive art programmes for their youth groups, as a preparatory livelihood skill.

Based on our earlier consultation at Lumbini, the government run mental hospital, we were again invited by Anjali to take up direct once-a-week intervention in another hospital, Pavlov (also government run). A 6 month intervention work with 12 male inmates (who are currently stable), focusing on communication, physical agility, reading-writing-calculation awareness and readiness for life is in progress since October, 2014 to May, 2015.

### **Library**

Shikshamitra's library completed a year in November, 2014! Over the first year we took time to observe, think and reflect on how the library took shape, and how, organically, it was emerging. We now believe that the space is more than only a library. It re-defined itself and suitably turned out to be an 'open learning space'.

Below is how and what we have been doing –

- a) By September 2014, it was necessary to arrange special sessions for children who
- could not read and write and do basic arithmetic
  - would benefit from more inputs in mathematics (classes 4 – 6)
- b) Library was being used by children as an ‘open space’ where they learnt and did activities independent of teachers.
- c) Books were being used by some to gather information about animals, insects, countries, and also to make toys following the book illustrations.
- d) Building blocks and other construction games are a big draw.
- e) The space acts as a crèche for some while a waiting room for some others.
- f) Art and craft is most loved, which engrosses them completely.

### **Publication**

Our publication went through a period of lull. Although we did not publish any new titles, we were happy to receive feedbacks of our previous year’s publications – ‘*Munia Pakhir Galpo*’, ‘*Khude Deshlai Kathi*’, ‘*Banglaye Onyo Mukh, Onyo Chahida*’.

Impact of ‘*Onyo Mukh Onyo Chahida*’ - the book, on experiential teaching of Bangla to the new generation school goers, has fetched positive feedback from teachers (ngos and mainstream), parents and many subalterns. The latter found the book very ‘simple, readable, enjoyable and implementable’ and enquired if the state government could benefit from it.

Teachers from rural government and non-government schools found it useful and considered it to be a good substitute in place of a suitable teacher training programme.

### **Material Production**

Existing material production has been on the rise in quantity with specific improvements in quality and matter.

Suggestions from many individuals and organizations have been of sincere help in improving them. New ideas have already been implemented and the final products will be made available from April 2015.

## ***Research Study and Documentation***

- ***Galpo Niye Study*** – This looks at the various ways that the set of story cards have been used and in what spaces they have been used. The intention of this study has been to understand if in implementation they meet the objective with which *Galpo Niye* was made.
- **Impact of the Bangla Reading and Writing Programme as used in Government Schools in 24 Parganas (North) 2013-2014** – Our teacher training and follow up programmes have helped us trace the degree to which and the manner in which the trainings have or have not been effective.

## ***People who left Shikshamitra***

**Taufik Riaz**, joined as the publication coordinator and arts teacher, discontinued as he did not agree with the work and vice versa.

**PromaBasu Roy** joined in 2013 and left in June 2014 as she preferred a more flexible work frame.

**Sajahan Ali Kaji**, our ex-student wanted to get along with life and devote more time to his business ventures.

## ***People who joined Shikshamitra***

**Rajashi Banerjee**, a student of Sociology and PhD aspirant has joined in February, 2015 for about two years to look after the library along with reporting, material making and part documentation.

**PromaBasu Roy** continued to do documentation of Shikshamitra works as a consultant. Since March 2015 Proma will be on the roll as the chief documentator.

**Dr. Aniruddha Deb**, a very well-known psychiatrist and author has always been close to Shikshamitra. Since March 2015 he has agreed to join our team as coordinator of publications.

## **Challenges**

1. The landlord is objecting to visitors and children's activities in the Shikshamitra space despite the agreement. It is a hindrance to our work and a continuous source of tension.
2. Having searched for suitable premises and being reassured of such availability, we will be looking at alternatives from May, 2015.
3. Finding and grooming more teachers in the Shikshamitra way.

## **Plan Shikshamitra through 2015-16:**

- New premise
- Regular meeting point of teachers
- Central courses in language and mathematics
- Developing a publication unit and creating new distribution technique
- Training of Shikshamitra teacher trainers
- Creating trainer of trainers at the field who have consistently implemented the Shikshamitra method in their schools and found it effective



**Activities at Pavlov, government run mental health home**