



SHIKSHAMITRA ANNUAL REPORT

SHIKSHAMITRA: Open Learning & Education Resource Centre
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SHIKSHAMITRA IN THE YEAR OF THE PANDEMIC



Beginning the year with a lockdown was unexpected and disappointing. With plans of work and largely those of life coming to a sudden halt, the greater part of the year was spent shut at home under restrictions worrying about sheer survival of people, both from Corona and much more from loss of livelihood and poverty. Many of us in Shikshamitra were busy reaching out to people, known and in general, trying to help in our own ways, be it through a boost of cash or some sort of useful collaboration.

However, true to our call and profession, educational pursuits in other forms started taking shape. Virtual teaching and learning gradually took the centre stage, rather it became the only possible mode to communicate with students and teachers – a new technique, which we were forced to compromise with, learn to manage, and adhere to.

No papers or sheets to hold, no real interactions in a room full of learners, no movements, no field visits, hardly any meetings at the Shikshamitra office . . . We too went totally virtual.

- Sudeshna Sinha, Founder

HIGHLIGHTS 2020-2021

- The creation, circulation, and online sales of Shikshamitra's UNLOCK LEARNING WORKSHEET PACKETS during the first wave of the pandemic, a timely effort.
- Our founder, Sudeshna, completed another year of continuous support as resource and special educator to the Techno India School (TIGPS), Ariadaha.
- Began doing trainings online with Wipro Partners, MACE and TIGPS, Ariadaha and will continue with this mode.
- Writing for *Learning Curve* and Speaking on Facebook for an Educational Platform.

PUBLICITY 2020-2021

- At the request of *Learning Curve*, a magazine published By Azim Premji University, Sudeshna wrote an article about Shikshamitra for the 7th Issue, August, 2020, which was entitled *Every Child Can Learn*. The article, *Shikshamitra: An Experimental School and Resource Centre* put together the journey of our work, our pedagogy, and how we have been sharing our knowledge with the teaching community.

See:

<https://archive.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/SitePages/resources-lc-issue-7-august-2020-shikshamitra.aspx>

- Sudeshna was invited by Shaikshik Agaz, Haryana, an educational platform, to speak on the topic of *Using Mother Tongue in the Classroom* and some Anecdotes. The program was aired on Facebook (Live) on 23 August, 2020. It was Hindi and attended by many who offered up interesting questions and remarks at the end.



"THE ART OF TEACHING IS THE ART OF ASSISTING DISCOVERY"

- MARK VAN DOREN

UNLOCK LEARNING WORKSHEETS



We were planning to bring out a collection of our worksheets in print by July 2020, this was long overdue and frequently sought after by many. When the Lockdown was imposed it put a spanner in our works. Or did it?

Maura, founder of Mustard Seeds and our in-house material and documents designer, came up with the idea of a digital series of creative worksheets that would be fun and beneficial for children, parents, and teachers and could be created immediately in those hours of lockdown. This was something we had kept wanting to do but also seemed to be putting off. From May till September 2020, a series of 5 packets of theme-based worksheets were developed. The packets were given the name Unlock Learning Worksheets, they were beautifully published and sold online. Maura's children contributed many of the original illustrations.

The language was deliberately chosen to be English, to reach out to users, pan-India and beyond. Each packet consisted of 12 - 16 sheets, meant for students between 8 and 14 years. Many of the worksheets were created for the original Shikshamitra school students and were tested. New ones were added as necessary. Some of the themes were Masks, Fashion, Insects and Movement. Appreciated by many and critiqued by some, these sheets were bought by quite a few (though we thought more people would take an interest and purchase to support our efforts).

The worksheets were a product of meticulous, online group work by Maura, Biswajit, and Sudeshna deciding on themes, content, and design. The idea culminated into the possibility of a workshop on "Understanding and Making Worksheets" to be held for teachers we work with - a plan for the near future.

Whom did the Unlock Learning packets appeal to?

- Parents and their children (8-12) from Kolkata, Bangalore, and Mumbai. We were delighted that some sent the child's completed worksheets back to us.
- NGOs in North East, Jharkhand, West Bengal.
- Teachers from M.P., Kerala, West Bengal. It is also interesting to note that they were successfully used by some tuition teachers in Kolkata.
- When the worksheets appeared on the APU Teachers Portal, they caught the attention of an organization called Teach in Urdu who translated them into Urdu with due recognition to Shikshamitra. These now appear on their free website for Urdu medium school teachers.



A few examples of the worksheets. The middle one was sent in.

Email us if you would like to order our UNLOCK LEARNING worksheets

Taking the role of special educator and resource person to Techno India School, TIGPS, Ariadaha, West Bengal

Working closely with Techno India School TIGPS in Ariadaha, West Bengal, Shikshamitra has been offering its training programmes and tailored, need-based orientations to its teachers since 2015. Teachers from other Techno India schools in West Bengal have also been included in summer workshops conducted by Shikshamitra. Over the years, Sudeshna became a mentor to the teachers and the Headmistress at the school in Ariadaha.

From November 2019 to February 2020, Sudeshna offered her expertise to help teachers (all) assess themselves and their work – and then refocus on the overall goals of the school. Further work was done with teachers at the elementary level (1 to 8) teaching different subjects, using the NCERT guidelines laid out in the Objectives for different subjects. Sudeshna focused chiefly on Languages: English, Bangla and Hindi, along with Social Studies.

From March, a large part of 2020 was entirely online, devoted to guiding the Bengali teachers (many new entrants) to emerge as good Bengali teachers along with their section head, who had already been introduced to Shikshamitra's pedagogy since 2015. Much was covered, beginning with the basic assessment procedures, language teaching techniques, looking at materials, their relevance and age appropriate application till solving individual teacher's dilemmas. One to one sessions and group sessions through zoom and over phone were used to hold workshops, clarify doubts and go over corrections and to discuss question papers created for online classes. The process continued for 5-6 months with close supervision and intermittent guidance to other subject teachers.

A regular review with the head of the school was extremely fruitful and channelized the way forward. The yearlong effort resulted in:

- a. A group of confident Bengali teachers, who have successfully acquired competence in assessments; preparing for a lesson at multiple levels; asking quality questions, worksheets and assessment sheets and critique the same; learning from student answer sheets and openly sharing their viewpoints while accepting critiques from colleagues.
- b. Some of them are ready to take up the role of Bengali teacher trainers; the teachers in a group could help and influence other language teachers too.

Overall development of the school: A school with a difference, TIGPS, Ariadaha, has built up a wonderful pedagogic structure and groomed an admirably able group of young teachers over the past 6 years. The Headmistress confers the credit to Shikshamitra's pedagogy for the school's noticeable transformation. It pleases us at Shikshamitra to be witnessing this beautifully successful process for dissemination of our ideology and methods.



"On our first visit to Shikshamitra, we weren't really sure what it was about. We were teaching in a well-reputed school and we had our required degrees in Education. A realisation soon dawned upon us when we understood that having subject knowledge and a teacher training degree is not enough. In fact, it's inadequate as far as classroom teaching is concerned. We were teaching indeed, but we thought of the process only from our end – and not from the student perspective. We have come a long way from that day to this. A lot of changes – in curriculum development, teaching methodologies, and collective perspectives – have helped us to achieve a lot."



1. WORK WITH WIPRO FOUNDATION

1) ENGLISH

Soon after the first phase of the English Foundation program for the North East partners in February 2020, the Corona outbreak necessitated a country-based lockdown which continued for almost a year. All actual visits and training programs were stalled. Virtual became the new norm.

In September, it was decided to resume the trainings online since things were getting so delayed. Recapitulation of Phase 1 of the English program was suggested since the participants didn't get a chance to try out the learning from Phase 1 and hence, had forgotten a lot of the material. Moreover, many of them had decided to resume classes with children, online or actual (with 4/5 students). A basic revision in 2-3 online classes with assignments revealed lot had been forgotten ending in confusion.

- A repeat training in English Phase 1 was planned spanning over 7 classes, from the end of September to mid-October. Interestingly, many of the materials and methods used in actual class transactions had to be adapted for the online mode and new materials evolved for this purpose.
- From end October/ early December, an implementation plan for 2 months (till December end – early January) was drawn up by each group. Shikshamitra did a close follow-up along with detailed and continuous hand holding. Almost all of them were able to teach the basics of English to the children which boosted their confidence level.
- Phase 2 of English Foundations was conducted soon after, from 25th January till 10th February 2021 (7 classes). Adaptation of actual Shikshamitra methods and materials for online sessions were the highlight. Post-Phase 2 implementation plans were discussed with all and drawn up by some. A fresh outbreak of Corona abruptly put a stop to the venture. By March, the second wave of the Covid pandemic had arrived.
- Workshop on Worksheets, proposed in November 2020, was given a fresh lease of thought and it was decided it could be implemented next. Personal misfortune (Sudeshna's) and unavoidable circumstances postponed that plan until April-May.

2) MATHS TRAINING FOR GRAMOTHAN, ORISSA

Planned for MAR/APRIL 2020, Biswajit from Shikshamitra geared up to conduct the Maths Foundation Course Phase 1 after having preparatory arrangements and discussions with Gramothhan and the Wipro team.

DEC 20 - JAN 21: the basic primary maths topics were covered in 9 classes, orienting and familiarising the Gramothhan team with different concrete materials.

Highlights included: 1) to move away from the norm, Biswajit did not share the worksheets with the participants. Instead they were guided to create worksheets on their own and to make them suitable to the concepts they had learned. The process was learned well and skills honed; 2) Though Hindi was the language of instruction, some found it difficult and things had to be explained in Oriya by Pratap and Aswini from Gramothhan. This was an important learning, that such would be the norm when working with teachers from the interiors of a state.

Since an actual follow-up visit was impossible, Biswajit has been following up online.

The planning and setting up of programs, and their smooth implementation can be attributed to the joint effort and continuous support and review we have received from the Wipro team!



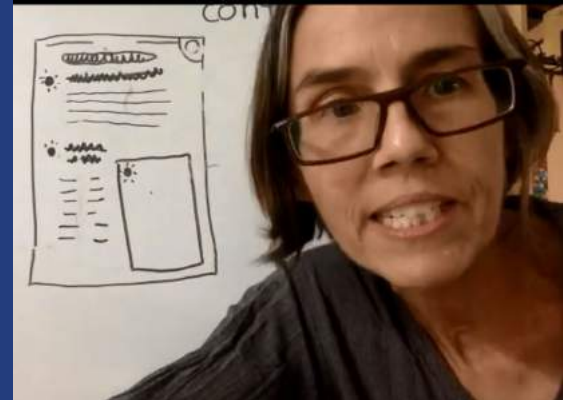
2. MODERN ACADEMY OF CONTINUING EDUCATION (MACE)



- MACE asked Sudeshna to teach their Teacher Training Course. She took a few specified sessions on Group Teaching, Reading & Writing, Lesson planning and TLM making. The classes beginning as real classroom interactions in March ended up becoming virtual after lockdown (June - July). This was the first of Shikshamitra's online efforts and duly had its share of hiccups.
- Biswajit, as he has been teaching for the last 3 years, took the entire Maths module for the same batch of students in August. He did it online and alone since Gopal could not join due to severe network issues and that fact that he could not travel into Kolkata.
- Biswajit taught the Maths module to students in March too. Gopal could join him this time. However, this was Shikshamitra's last involvement with MACE since the organization has suspended its work.

3. LIBRARY ARTS ORIENTATION WORKSHOP FOR TEACHERS OF TIGPS, ARIADHA

- Maura conducted a three-day workshop online for teachers to introduce them to several concepts about Library Arts. This was the first time she did a class online. Some of the topics she covered with teachers included:
 - Finding modern, mind-bending reading materials is an art in itself and you need to stay on top of what new children's literature is being published. Stay away from old moralistic stories; children are much more sophisticated than that.
 - How to read aloud with sound effects and suspense.
 - Finding paths to follow from a certain story and creating writing, art, and other hands-on activities to help children internalize the story's underlying ideas and learning.
 - Getting children to write their own books and add them to the library shelves.
 - Bringing in speakers who tell their stories, "the Human Library" project.



THE WAY FORWARD

Thoughts and concerns about the future of Shikshamitra are frequently mulled upon. Our well wishers and associates are keen to ask about it and keep raising questions to us. Answers and suggestions are juggled about. Very soon, in April, an online discussion will be arranged to listen to each other and air our views and ideas. The possibility of new collaborations is also not ruled out.

