



SHIKSHAMITRA: Open Learning & Education Resource Centre
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SHIKSHAMITRA ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022

Born in 2005 as an alternative school and education resource centre, Shikshamitra has for 17 years strived to create its path – changing when required while carefully choosing what would be the best fit for its ultimate growth and identity. Shikshamitra has continuously ventured to find its own niche and utilize its potential for any individual or group that would most benefit. Knowing its limits and strengths, Shikshamitra has remained small, with the aim of providing personal care and long-term assistance to all those who have asked for it. 2021-2022 seemed to be the preparatory year for yet another major change: We had made it through the pandemic and were now facing post-pandemic challenges, such as questions of sustainability and future development. We felt a need to partner with others that share common goals in order to have an impact. We deeply wanted the pedagogic knowhow – and all that is Shikshamitra – to be carried forward by the next best person within the organization. As you will read here, the time for that has come. We appreciate your support through this next part of our journey.

- Sudeshna Sinha, Founder



HIGHLIGHTS 2021-2022



Reading a Shikshamitra storybook at Mustard Seeds Library

• GETTING BACK TO TEACHING CHILDREN POST-COVID

In October 2021 a two-day a week program in basic Numeracy and English was started at Mustard Seeds Library in Salt Lake, Kolkata (run by our teacher, Maura Hurley) for the children of the adjacent Duttabad slum community. The children were out of school for a long time and exhibited huge gaps in their learning. The plan was for Biswajit to teach Maths while Maura did English with them. An assessment of the children at the beginning confirmed the need for laying the foundation in Bangla because without some basic language proficiency not much else could be done, not even Maths. For the first time, Biswajit successfully taught Bangla the Shikshamitra way to these children before moving on to Maths. Foundational Bangla is usually taught by language teachers in Shikshamitra but as a teacher, Biswajit had no other choice. This proved once again that a teacher needs to be able to teach both the foundational Literacy and Numeracy – something we have always felt at Shikshamitra. Ultimately, the children learned Maths better because they were getting grounding in Bangla.

• PUBLICITY

At the request of *Samuhik Pahal*, a magazine published by Wipro Foundation, Sudeshna wrote an article in January, 2022 about the linkages between numbers and language. The article was based on her experience in schools and her own reflections. The article, *Numeracy and Literacy – Understanding and Reflecting upon the Interconnectedness*, appeared in *Samuhik Pahal, Volume 2, Issue 6: Demystifying Mathematics*. Please do have a look at the article online.



The entrance point to our new office and classroom space.

SHIKSHAMITRA FINDING A NEW WAY at a new space

NEW FACES, CONTRACTS, & ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES!

Beginning his journey right from the inception of Shikshamitra, Biswajit has been able to imbibe the true spirit of Shikshamitra, reflected in his pedagogical practices. It was in the classrooms of Shikshamitra School that we developed our pedagogy founded in concepts like dignity, inclusion, trust, and participation. Biswajit honed his potential to become a teacher here, learning from hard earned achievements and plenty of failures too. Through it all, Biswajit learned to innovate and create learning content that was relevant to his learners. He imagined the necessary methods for teaching with the Shikshamitra spirit and designed the subsequent teaching-learning tools to ensure quality learning in a congenial atmosphere for all students.

When we shifted gears, Biswajit was able to transfer pedagogy for a children's classroom and apply it successfully for teachers. He established himself as a very able and well-accepted teacher trainer once Shikshamitra ventured full time into Teacher Training and has continued for the last 14 years. Maths has been Biswajit's area of specialization and zone of comfort, however it was evident that he was equally deft at communication, planning, and managing programs – along with all the logistics.

We now find Shikshamitra facing some important issues: Sudeshna wishes to reduce her duties and our rent contract will come due at the end of August 2022, to name a few. Still, we feel that Shikshamitra must continue its work, so finding some alternative way of being obviously became urgent and necessary.

Around the same time, Shikshamitra received an offer from Her Future Coalition (HFC), an anti-trafficking organization that was starting a co-working space for NGOs in the Sobhabazaar area of Kolkata. HFC reached out to Shikshamitra, asking us to partner at their new Learning Centre by taking charge of some of the educational programs there. After many discussions and meetings Shikshamitra finally decided to accept the offer and try the arrangement out, agreeing to enter a short-term contract with HFC. By doing so, Shikshamitra can continue the work it has already established over the years with other organizations, like Wipro, but we also have a workspace where we can use our expertise to create new learning opportunities for an entirely new area of learners. The moment was also just right for Biswajit to start assuming the new leadership of Shikshamitra.

We would like to thank Her Future Coalition for this generous offer of space and partnership. We hope to build up a strong mutual relationship based on our Shikshamitra principles.

We also thank Biswajit Chitrakar for his dedication and steadfast ability to remain flexible and involved.



HIGHLIGHTS 2021-2022 CONTINUED

• WORKING ALONGSIDE LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS

At the juncture we find ourselves, post-pandemic, Shikshamitra feels a deep conviction to start taking concrete steps towards addressing the burning need for restoring literacy and numeracy among the large number of marginalized children in the public school system. The first and foremost task will need be fostering a number of future teachers who want to master our techniques for teaching literacy and numeracy in different pockets of Kolkata and outside.

In light of this, at the request of three voluntary civil society groups, Rokeya Shiksha Kendra, Prithibir Pathshala, and Sanghati Pathshala, Shikshamitra conducted a 3-day workshop in Foundational Bangla: Reading and Writing, followed by Creative Writing and Orientation to Library Activities from 13 to 15 November, 2021.

With the aim of trying to create alternative non-institutional learning spaces for children from poor working families, who have literally not stepped foot in a school due to Covid, these young volunteer teachers had been struggling to teach basic Bengali, Maths, or English. The workshop was attended by 50 -60 volunteers, the first of this kind of exposure for them. They learned effective techniques for teaching reading and writing using basic Bangla to the children. Because it was a crash course, we were doubtful that all 50 of them would be able to grasp the content and take it back to their teaching environments so we insisted that they keep in touch with us and have promised to stay on call for hand-holding support.

Later at the beginning of the new year, we followed up with the same organizations for workshops in English (2 - 4 Jan) and Maths (28 - 30 Jan). We explained to them our request to restrict the number of participants to 25 to promote deeper and more personalized teaching/learning. Rokeya Shiksha Kendra has been most open to working with and learning from Shikshamitra and has stayed in constant touch with us - we see great potential in working with them.

• IN-PERSON FOLLOW-UP FOR ONLINE MATHS WORKSHOP WITH GRAMOTHHAN

The first phase of Primary Maths was done online by Biswajit in 2021 for the teachers of Gramothhan, a Wipro partner in Orissa. When pandemic was over Gramothhan requested the Shikshamitra maths team for an actual visit and both Gopal Mondal and Biswajit Chitrakar visited their learning centres on 28th February till 2nd March. The visit confirmed that the online teaching did not help the teachers learn as much as a face to face workshop could have. A revision workshop will have to be done along with the 2nd phase of maths in mid 2022.



Library workshop at Suchana

WORKSHOP ON LIBRARY ACTIVITIES AT SUCHANA LEARNING COMMUNITY

Suchana from Chandipur, Birbhum, has been providing holistic education opportunities for local Santhal and Kora children in the nearby villages. Suchana offers mobile library facilities to the children in different villages. They needed to develop and expand the activities being done in their children's library program, particularly around books. Mahua Dutta (Shikshamitra librarian), along with Biswajit (Training coordinator) offered an intense, day-long workshop rich in activities around books, for the teachers of Suchana. Teachers from Wild Chhotanagpur Plateau Trust from Bankura also attended as the two groups have mutual goals.

MORE HIGHLIGHTS 2021-2022

LEARNING FROM SHIKSHAMITRA: Reporting on our outreach

In 2020-21, Shikshamitra provided orientation and training in English for teachers from two organizations in Assam and one organization in Manipur and we continue to provide support to them. All of the organizations have benefitted significantly from these relationships, with a few teachers turning out to be promising facilitators who will be future resource people.

LFA, now KAROU EDUCATION FOUNDATION in Imphal, Manipur

This group created its own English Module inspired by Shikshamitra's. KEF founder Yasin Khan was able to create a group of young teachers, training them in the Accelerated English program. Simultaneously he prepared a handbook with lesson plans for English Teaching, building it after the Shikshamitra module and keeping the convenience of local teachers in mind. He wishes to make it available for government primary teachers and has made a formal presentation to the teachers body in March 2022.

NORTH EASTERN EDUCATIONAL TRUST (NEET) from Guwahati, Assam

This organization was one of the three organizations trained in English from 2020 - 2021. Like any other place, NEET realised the immediacy of building a strong base in Literacy in Assamese. On the suggestion of Shikshamitra, they approached Pratham in Assam for training in reading skills. They also asked for our entire Bangla Module, all materials and manuals from Shikshamitra, along with a daylong step-by-step orientation to the methods. Now, we are excited to report that NEET is in the process of translating and developing their own module in Assamese. We look forward to seeing that completed.

PHOTO GALLERY



Maths follow-up session at Gramothan



Bangla Workshop for three civil society groups



English teacher training for three civil society groups

NEW TRAININGS FOR WIPRO PARTNERS • 2021-2022



SHIKSHAMITRA HAS CREATED TWO NEW TRAINING MODULES FOR PARTNERS OF WIPRO FOUNDATION

1. WORKSHOP ON WORKSHEETS

Teaching children through worksheets became rampant during the pandemic years and worksheets were much in demand. However it was necessary for the teachers or parents to have a thorough knowledge about the worksheets in the first place.

Therefore a 3 days' workshop module on worksheets was created (for academic level 3 to 6) for providing participants with the basic knowledge of what a worksheet is, its types, its features and the purpose along with the knowhow for making one and using it in any learning space.

The workshop took place online in May 2022, for 15 participants from 8 organizations across India and facilitated by Sudeshna, Maura and Biswajit.

Shikshamitra used its rich store of Worksheets to illustrate and explain and also included the sheets made by the participants in their organizations.

WORK DONE:

The areas covered included - looking at worksheets – categories, features of a good worksheet; purpose of worksheet, doing and making a worksheet together; learning to design worksheets by hand and digitally; comparing a worksheet with other kinds of sheets; learning to use worksheets in a classroom/any learning space and correcting a worksheet.

OBSERVATIONS:

There was a need for such a workshop among the participants since worksheets were the necessary answers in the time of covid induced lockdown.

The workshop was a very rewarding learning experience for all.

Materials shared and techniques were much appreciated and most of the content was welcome and refreshingly new for almost all

Participation was free and stimulating allowing space for further thinking on the part of the facilitators; additional materials had to be created and shared.

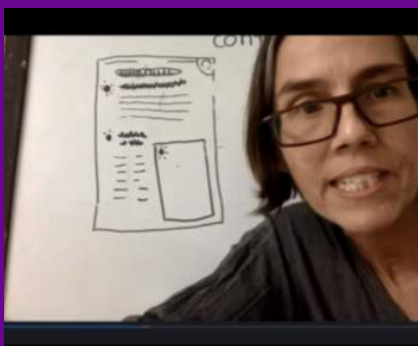
TAKEAWAY:

The workshop was beyond 'worksheet just as a tool'. It brought out the different learning aspects that are associated with conceiving, creating and using a worksheet or sheets and which often remain unexplained or hidden. Therefore it worked out to be a wholesome pedagogic exposure for the learners within a short period of time.

2. PREPARING FOR THE ACCELERATED ENGLISH PROGRAM INTEGRATED WITH ART & MUSIC

Suggested by Wipro Foundation in June 2021, Shikshamitra took up the idea of trying to include art and music as integral parts of language learning. Shikshamitra had often integrated music and art in its school and had witnessed its benefit. Therefore the idea was eagerly welcomed. Usually people never ask for such an approach; each area is seen as separate chunks.

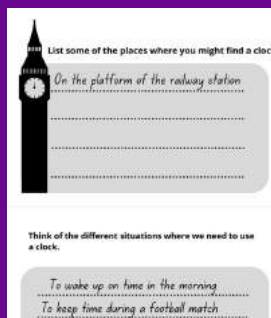
The preparations began in November 2021 and the flyer for AN ENGLISH PROGRAM INTEGRATED WITH ART & MUSIC was circulated by Wipro Foundation among its partners. A number of organizations showed interest and a list of possible participants was drawn up by February.



Maura introduces Design points for online Workshop on Worksheets



Worksheets created by participants at end of Workshop on Worksheets



Prepping for English with Art and Music Integration

PRE-WORKSHOP TASKS

1. UNDERSTANDING THE RESOURCE ORGANIZATION, PARTICIPANTS AND NEED ASSESSMENT

Shikshamitra prefers to visit prior to any training in order to make acquaintance with the organizations, the participants, and also to do a quick assessment of their needs. With the pandemic situation still raging, it was decided that Sudeshna would call on an agreed date and time to talk one-to-one with a participant or the person in charge (pre-determined by the organization) following a structure. This process is an effort to get to know each other better and ensure that the right kinds of people are chosen. The organizations are also then clear about the nature of the program and whether it matches their needs. An added need-assessment sheet looking into the learning levels of the children was sent and duly filled-in by most organizations. This gave Shikshamitra an overall glimpse of the levels of English and Mother Language within these organizations.

2. PREPARATIONS WITHIN SHIKSHAMITRA

In spite of the excitement about integrating art and music with the existing English program, it took hours and days of planning. The challenge was to blend Art and Music in such a way that it unobtrusively complements and improves the learning of English. How much was good and beneficial was a perpetual question. Moreover, it was difficult for the Music and Art Resource person to learn and accept that no pure Music and Art sessions alone will be done. One had to be careful that the sentiments of people were also not hurt! Ideally the language should complement the learning of music and art – and vice versa. We soon found it was much more difficult to do than said or imagined. The balance was crucial.

From the outset, Sudeshna remained skeptical about . . .

Whether the art and music sessions might deter the concentration on English learning?

Would justice be done to all concepts?

Slated to be held in mid June 2022, most of the planning for the workshop was over by March 2022.

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