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Education

Supplementary schools

We ran eight of them in six villages. The table below gives details of location and enrolment.

Village	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV (K. G., V etc)	Others
	M F T	M F T	M F T	M F T	M F T
Fatullyapur	3 3 6	1 3 4	0 4 4	1 0 1	1 2 3
Fatullyapur	4 4 8	3 2 5	5 2 7	-	-
Fatullyapur	7 5 12	2 6 8	1 2 3	-	-
Bajitpur	2 6 8	1 1 2	2 2 4	3 3 6	-
Audharmanik	2 2 4	0 1 1	3 3 6	0 3 3	2 4 6
Koslur	3 3 6	4 1 5	3 2 5	3 3 6	-
Chandalati	1 4 5	4 2 6	4 1 5	1 0 1	4 5 9
Kurulgachha	4 1 5	2 1 3	2 1 3	0 2 2	3 1 4
	26 28 54	17 17 34	20 17 37	8 11 19	10 12 22

The three schools at Patullyapur have a total enrolment of 18, 20, and 23 respectively, that at Bajitpur 20, at Andharmanik 20, at Kolsur 22, at Chandalati 26, and the one at Kurulgachha 17. Of the total 166 students in these schools 81 are boys and 85 girls.

None of the schools has a permanent— structure and they sit on verandas or rooms provided by local people. All schools have blackboards and various materials with which to make educational aids.

Four whole-day workshops were held for the eight teachers in which they discussed various experiments stemming from the prescribed lessons, and also learnt to make aids to make teaching more effective - and meaningful.

Our education supervisor makes a weekly visit to every school and his reports are discussed at a monthly meeting at Swanirvar which all teachers attend. It was found early in the year that no teacher could give full attention to individual needs with so many students from four or more classes under his or her charge, and it was then decided that, depending on the teacher's convenience the students would be divided into two groups comprising two classes each, and each group will attend school on alternate days. There was strong opposition from guardians and finally a compromise was reached that the teacher would attend to one group on any day, while the other would study by itself.

An evaluation format was designed by a Calcutta based special educator and when we had finished the work we found our doubts were valid; the children were not learning very much. The main reasons were two; first, we had intended these schools to “supplement” the teaching imparted at the Government primary schools, which all our students attended, but since these teach almost nothing, our teachers were saddled with the job of teaching everything from scratch; their work was made all the more difficult by the fact that they had to teach students from three, four, or more classes simultaneously.

We have not been able to find a way out of these, and so have to reconcile ourselves to the disappointment that as far as the 3 R's are concerned, we are not doing anything spectacular. There was, however, another purpose behind our starting these schools. We wished to bring out the latent creativity in every child, and to make the process of growing up fun: We dare say we have succeeded in both to a certain extent.

The children are taught how to sing how to recite and sing rhymes, and they, have performed plays before a general audience. In October an evening of a variety performance by children of the local school was presented at Andharmanik. In January, two-day festivals were held at both Chandalati and Fatullyapur, complete with sports meets, plays, physical exercise, songs and dances. An expert from Calcutta visits Chandalati, Fatullyapur and Bajitpur in successive weeks to train children in mass physical exercise, yoga, etc. Through all these cultural and physical activities we are trying to inculcate certain human values. For example, a short play on communal harmony has won great praise wherever the children have presented it.

Pre-primary schools : Four such schools, for children between 3 and 5 years of age, have been running at Bajitpur, Chandalati, Andharmanik, and Fatullyapur since July 1992. The teachers were trained in Calcutta in a system adapted from the Montessori method. Surveys were made of prospective students and a number of meetings with guardians were held. This was found necessary to popularise the idea of a “school” for so small children, and to explain the concept of learning without books. We must confess that even though at every centre the children have made good progress in development of initiative through individual freedom of action, improvement of sense perception, and development of coordination through exercises and games, many parents are still not reconciled to “bookless” learning.

The schools at Chandalati, Bajitpur and Fatullyapur started with 30 children each, and the one

at Andharmanik had 28. A few children later left to join the Government primary school-pre-school children ' often go with their elder siblings-but we did not take in any replacements as we did not wish to disturb the tenor of the progress. With two teachers for every school, individual monitoring is a feature of these schools.

The teachers attended a second course of training in February 1993.

The schools sit for 2 hours or a little more and besides Montessori kits, various locally made aids,. using locally available material are used by the teachers. The children are taught in addition to the usual Montessori package, songs about personal hygiene, action recitations, etc.

Our own evaluation is that this project is a mixed success. The method we have adopted cannot yield best results if the teachers are not imaginative and innovative. Unfortunately not all our teachers can be said to be either or both, but we have to do with what we have. A young man or woman may be competent in all ways, but may still lack the vital spark with which to ignite the enthusiasm of small children. An exaggerated sense of discipline so ingrained in some of our teachers that they fail to transmit a sense of joy to the students. I wonder if any amount of training can alter this personality profile.

Guardians' meetings are held in every village, but they are not as regular in the other three centres as at Chandalati where the parents pay a regular monthly fee, however nominal, and the villagers donate money to provide biscuits to the children.

Cultural activities : We now have a group which presents plays in a manner approximating to the third theatre methodology. We have also popularised a very athletic form of traditional dance from Andhra Pradesh.