



CREATIVE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS
BACKGROUND NOTE

STATE LEVEL WORKSHOP ON READING & LANGUAGE
DEVELOPMENT

8th - 9th June, 2017

ORGANISED BY

AGRAGAMEE

AT/PO. Kashipur, Dist. Rayagada, Odisha.



INTRODUCTION

Children in tribal regions have faced multiple exclusions for generations, including exclusion from quality education, proper nutrition, good health and health care, employment opportunities etc. The most significant of these in terms of long term implications could be said to be education. Needless to emphasise quality education, which enables children to read, write and understand maths, history, science and other subjects is the single most crucial factor that can help a community climb out of poverty. It is also being increasingly acknowledged that low performance in education and poor socio-economic standards are self-reinforcing characteristics that tie communities across the world to low income and poverty. The biggest challenge is education of first generation school children, who are able to receive little or no support at home for their academic learning. This is more apparent in a large and diverse country like India, where class, caste and geographical divides enable a few to access the best education in the world, while a staggeringly large majority of children struggle with basic learning.

The problem has been evidenced in several reports and studies, across the country, including the Pratiche Report, The PROBE (People's Report on Education), and much more recently, the ASER (Annual Survey of Education Report). The last named, as a matter of fact underlines that while girls from poor rural backgrounds face a double disadvantage, children from poorer families in rural as well as urban areas score much worse than their more fortunate counterparts.

Thus we find that even at the end of 6 to 8 years of schooling, a very large number of children have very poor literacy levels. Literacy, or the ability to read and understand a written text, and to express oneself through writing is a crucial skill for learning in any subject. Research shows that these kinds of reading and literacy skills are more reliable predictors of economic and social well-being of communities than the number of years spent in school. The lack of or poor levels of such skills affects the educational development of the individual for life. Such adults are also ill-equipped to guide the reading and literacy development of their offspring, making this a self-perpetuating cycle.

Those who can afford it help their children overcome problems of poor quality of teaching through private schools and tuitions; the less well off have no such options. This is true even in urban slum settlements, where Government schools provide very little real education. Teachers in these schools are poorly motivated, and also unable to assimilate the pedagogic inputs provided during in-service capacity building Programs. This often results in their inability to use learning material provided for the schools to the best effect. All this has resulted in India lagging far behind in educational achievements.

Poor learning is not the only consequence of this scenario. A school education, which does not provide the stimulus and opportunity for the use of children's minds and cognitive abilities in creative and engaging ways, where too much emphasis is given to mechanical memorising, and fear is the only disciplining factor, affects children's mental development. It decreases interest and slows down learning, thus necessitating more than double the time normally required to acquire even the basic literacy skills. This is all the more prevalent in schools which cater to children from poorer communities.

The children from poorer communities and in the tribal regions thus have multiple disadvantages. Poverty often forces them to take time out of their school and studies, and work to help their parents in earning a livelihood. In addition they suffer from chronic nutritional deficiencies, which makes them easy prey to diseases and further reduces their ability to study and work. The challenge then is to break this self-reinforcing cycle of poverty and low learning levels.

AGRAGAMEE'S EFFORTS:

Agramee has sought to consolidate its long experience in tribal education through the “Mukta Gyana Kutira” or Centres For Learning With Freedom, in some of the remotest regions of the tribal districts in Odisha. These schools have focused on girls as a necessary effort to address the huge gender gap in education in the tribal regions. They have been able to demonstrate a model of education that helps the learner progress towards an emancipatory path of learning. This vibrant Program of primary education located in Adri and Padepadar in Kalahandi District, and Kashipur in Rayagada District enables first generation school children begin to read with ease by the time they cross Class II, encourages children to love creative expressions in the form of illustrated stories, reports of events, children’s magazines, and a wall magazine and have fun with theatre, drawing, and maths and science through innovative ideas as also workshops, and camps.

The interventions include primary schools for tribal girls, primers and guides for easy and fun language development, innovations and engagements for development of maths, science and other subjects, teacher training and development efforts, and linking up with the Government in various ways. These efforts have helped establish child centred processes, where learning, fun and play merge into one another, helping teachers enjoy their work almost as much as the children. These schools have also been centres for innovation and creative efforts, leading to the development of the model of language and literacy teaching that is being adopted in Government Schools across three districts. This project thus offers the opportunity for up-scaling this unique model which have helped its students make significant progress in a short time.

Over the decade of their existence, these schools have been able to prove their worth, and develop a keen interest for education in the villages. They have also been able to break the taboos and barriers to girls education in the tribal villages. They provide education to 350 girl children from 15 villages, and have been greatly appreciated by the local village community for the learning levels achieved by the students.

Some tangibles which we are proud of include production of the newsletter, ‘Dangar Katha’ or Stories from the Hills written completely by the children for last 5 years, monthly children’s wall magazines (Classes prefer to do separate wall magazines, indicating children’s progress from just drawing and colouring to illustrated stories and reports), helping children from zero literacy villages pass matriculation and pursue further studies, breaking caste barriers by demonstrating quality in teaching, spread of literacy and learning to older generations and sibling by Mukta Gyana Kutira students

This initiative has helped local communities also understand the provisions under the Right to Education Act, and has started a process of reforming the state school system. The initiatives has already established itself as a model for expanding primary education among the disadvantaged girl children in a way which is at the same time highly attractive for children as also effective in bridging gaps that affect education of children from underprivileged communities and sections.

CREATIVE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS (CLDE) CONCEPT:

CLDE seek to expand the model of Mukta Gyana Kutir and address the fundamental problem of reading and literacy by facilitating easy, fun and effective learning through teacher training and lively, innovative teaching learning material in Government Primary Schools in the poorest districts of Odisha.

The project reaches out to 4000 children in Schools in Rayagada, Nabrangpur and Koraput Districts. This model reverses literacy teaching by encouraging children to begin with meaningful and fun words and

images, move on to sentences, rhymes and word play and in the process develop an understanding of the phonetics of reading. It thus makes Literacy learning as intuitive as language learning by encouraging teachers to combine play and study in their classrooms. By Class III or IV children are able to write stories, essays and even reports with illustrations, which are published in their newsletters “Dangar Katha” every year.

The approach is based on 3 core concepts:

- ◆ Respect for the child’s knowledge and abilities,
- ◆ Dynamic and Creative Teacher Training
- ◆ Innovative and fun TLM

The programme has several unique features. It takes on the challenge of addressing issues of scale and quality at the same time, and emphasises teacher development as much as teaching method. It helps children become good readers and develop creative writing skills. Equity in education has been by and large elusive in India. By demonstrating quality education for first generation school goers in some of the poorest areas, this programme also takes the first essential steps in this direction. *The program thus demonstrates an effective, stress free model for literacy that can be up-scaled to benefit all tribal regions of Odisha.*

THE WORKSHOP

In order to share Agramee’s experiences and efforts in reading and language development in tribal regions, as well as to seek collective solutions to this serious stumbling block to development in the tribal regions, Agramee is organising a State Level Workshop on Reading & Language Development, on the 8th and 9th June, 2017. The objective of the workshop are as follows:

- ◆ Presentation of Agramee’s methods and teaching learning materials for early Grade Reading, along with the best practices and success stories
- ◆ Addressing concerns of quality education in tribal areas
- ◆ Understanding Teacher and teaching issues in tribal regions
- ◆ Exploring possibilities for scaling up, and involvement of different stakeholders.

The details of the workshop are as follows:

- Venue: Hotel Presidency,
- Date: 8th and 9th June, 2017
- Time: 10am to 5.30pm

The workshop will have the participation of different stakeholders, including SMC members, representatives from NGOs and INGOs, concerned and working for education of marginalised groups, academics involved in training and teaching pedagogy, like minded individuals, teachers and Government personnel from concerned department. We are looking forward to engaged and lively discussions that will help us understand in depth the dimensions of the problem, the multi-dimensional efforts to address it, as also issues of scale and expansion.