

## **Samarthanam**

*Bangalore Visit: September 2006 by Shantha Kumar*

I made 2 visits to Samarthanam the first for the tutorial program and the second to see their reading program.

### **Tutorial Program**

The timings of the tutorial classes have been changed to start at half an hour earlier. They start now at 9:15 AM. The class seemed in full attendance around 9:45 AM when I reached. There were several children in the lower classes who had already come to school (they were just hanging around, playing, talking etc). So it would appear that the children come to school early anyway.

The tutorial program works the following way. The children in Classes 6 and 7 have about 50 children each (they have been divided into 2 sections). The 5<sup>th</sup> standard has over 100 children. The regular class rooms are used for the tutorial sessions. The children all sit in rows on the floor (as they do for the regular classes), with books open. It does not seem any different from what would be the regular class session...same books. The classes go over what has been taught in class. The class for 5<sup>th</sup> grade is overfull, with no place for the teacher to move around...there were abt 90 kids that day. The teachers work in rotation, each one taking a different class each day, each one assigned to a specific subject: English, Kannada, Social Studies, Math and Science.

The children seemed quite enthusiastic as did the teachers who as far as I could judge were quite well trained. These are IED teachers (Integrated Education) which is a program that is sponsored by the Karnataka government. Other than their tutorial sessions in Hulimavu, these teachers are sent to different corporation schools in the Bangalore region to work with special needs children in small groups. They are funded by grants provided by the government to different NGOs that monitor their work, Samarthanam being one of them. (Samarthanam has 21 resource teachers that are spread over 74 schools). Nirmala Dixit who coordinates the program, herself is an IED teacher.

Since all the children have English as part of the regular curriculum from Class 5, I decided that I would ask them some simple questions in English (also my Kannada is pretty basic). I asked them to describe a simple object such as a tree, and tried to help them out with 'A tree is tall', 'It has green leaves', etc. Then we went on to a topic like 'My book'. A few children in class 6 and 7 were able to respond with sentences like 'A tree is big' and a 'This is a tree', 'I read a book' but overall both their comprehension as well as their ability to make a sentence was woefully low. When the teacher talked to them in Kannada and asked questions in Social Studies or Science, they seemed quite animated and several hands were raised to answer questions. Not so for English. In 5<sup>th</sup> class, where they have just started English, the children recited some English rhymes, but don't understand much of what they are saying.

One of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade sections was doing Math; the teacher seemed competent. On my asking, he picked out problems in algebra (word problem and a few division problems)... Many children wanted to do the problems on the board...the teacher was quite firm in terms of format (signs, steps etc) and the children seemed to understand and follow his methodology.

### *Overall Impression*

Tutorials just an extension of class: nothing is really being added to that.

No individual attention can be paid or any deviation from curriculum

Crowded

Hard to assess the impact of these classes, as far as English is concerned, don't think there is much impact

**Reading Session** (part of our regular program, Hippocampus monitored) : this was on a Friday.

50 children have been selected from 5<sup>th</sup> grade for this program. There are 2 sections, each of them being monitored by one of the tutorial teachers. The 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades have their usual classes.

The class time that is being used is the same morning session, the children have been selected based on some criterion of regularity, interest, etc. Hippocampus which trains the reading teachers as well as monitors the program closely, does not want the sessions to be any bigger. HC has a strict attendance code, also has a well documented curriculum where the teacher has clear instructions what to do in each reading session, what activities should be conducted after each session, the book sequence and so on.

Hippocampus has provided a set of books (several copies of the same book) such that between 2 to 3 children share a book. The books are story books in Kannada, well illustrated and quite amusing. The classroom was arranged so that the children sat in small groups and the teacher could walk around. The book in session was on Balloons .. a young boy finds a balloon and plays with it all day...pretending to be a boy with a cricket bat, an old man with a stick, a man on a horse, a monkey with a tail and so on. The children took turns dramatizing it and there were many volunteers and lot of laughter. After that, the teacher asked them questions about the story. The children seemed to really have a great time. She then gave them worksheets which they did in groups...questions on the text, word puzzles, fill in the blanks, drawing out the story and so on.

In the other reading session class, the children were completing the work sheets (I believe these have to be sent to HC also). The teacher then started them on a game, where she had them running in a circle and called out numbers and the children had to form groups of that size. Simple game, but enough to get all of them involved and alert.

<http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/mp/2005/01/08/stories/2005010803000300.htm>  
[http://prayatna.typepad.com/satya/2005/07/hippocampus\\_\\_a\\_.html](http://prayatna.typepad.com/satya/2005/07/hippocampus__a_.html)

### **Nutrition Program**

I could not make it to Hulimavu at lunch time to see their nutrition program. I spoke to Nirmala about cutting the program or reducing it (number of days), and she requested that we continue it till March and not do it mid year, since the children look forward to the shundal that they get everyday ( different kind of lentils are used). There is no doubt that the children are in need of better nutrition, most of them look quite undernourished.

### **Library Program**

I saw the library (basically the class room with the book cupboard). It was stocked with both Kannada and English books (some from Hippocampus and several donated books, many in English) and met the librarian (an orthopedically handicapped gir who has been trained by HC). I could not make it to the library period which is at the end of the day, but this is a program that is monitored by HC again. For the 5<sup>th</sup> grade children, the book is read to them, they are not allowed to check out books. 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade children read in the class during library period and can also take a book home. Track is kept of the children who read the books and HC rewards the children who read a certain number of books by taking them on a field trip. So far no one had qualified. If not for the library program, the students go home in the period assigned for extra curricular activities, since no teacher is appointed for this.

### *Overall Impression*

Several of the donated books were in English, which the children will have a hard time reading. I suggested that they increase the number of Kannada books as well, so that the children have a wider pool of books to choose from.

### **Saturday Program**

There was no Saturday program for the 2 weeks that I was there, since the children were preparing for their mid-term exams. This is where the children come and do sports, quizzes etc under the supervision of the IED teachers.

### Strengths of Samarthanam and

- 1) Very good and capable manager in Nirmala Dixit
- 2) Multiple funding sources
- 3) Receptive Organization...can help it grow
- 4) Trained IED teachers
- 5) Relationship with Hippocampus
- 6) Volunteer Pool
- 7) Very positive outlook

### Weaknesses

- 1) Too many programs, cannot see the synergies clearly...also spreads existing management quite thin
  - Hostel for girls
  - Hostel for boys

- Training for Visually Handicapped
- Hulimavu school/Tutoring Program
- High School (started abt a year ago)
- Food Preparation and Distribution for several schools
- IED program

#### Next Steps

Continue the tutorial program for 2006-2007

For the years ahead

- 1) Start Reading programs in other schools and use the same IED teachers
- 2) Check with Hippocampus if the Reading Program can be for the younger children as well.
- 3) Expand the Library Program in other schools (taking into account HC's ability to monitor them)
- 4) Look at programs like Dhvani, which works closely with corporation schools to improve them rather than to hold parallel classes.
- 5) Teaming with organizations that are doing 'education' in a big way like Pratham/Akshara