Chamarajanagara stories

Language, Literacy and Learning

The Kannada Kalika Kosha programme

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Foreword

This book contains reflections from the *Kannada Kalika Kosha*, a joint programme of The Promise Foundation, the National Institute of Advanced Studies and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Karnataka) under the District Quality Education Programme (DQEP). *Kannada Kalika Kosha* grew out of the Language Development Programme (LDP) which started in Chamarajanagara District in 2003 and will conclude in November, 2007. The LDP has been jointly funded by Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Mumbai, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Karnataka and The Promise Foundation, Bangalore. The Programme partnered with children, teachers, cluster resource persons and block development officers to promote literacy and language learning of children in classes I to V.

The purpose of LDP was to understand the language learning needs of children in Chamarajanagara and to conceptualise and develop a comprehensive programme to support their literacy attainments.

As the project progressed, many anecdotes emerged from the community, schools, classrooms and playfields. We also gained several insights from a research project where we followed 411 children over the four years as they moved from primary school into middle school. The anecdotes and research findings illustrate for us how children's language, literacy and learning are linked.

We anticipate that the Chamarajanagara stories will stimulate discussions about literacy and language teaching practices. The experiences are likely to remind us that the quality of schooling and the bridges that schools build with the child's world can make a difference. We also think that insights that we have gained about the Kannada *akshara* could help in the introspection of the cognitive resources and literacy experiences that promote learning in all Indian (*akshara*) languages.

Sonali Nag.
July, 2007.

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- HegdeHundi GOK
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- Kadahalli GOK
- Vaddagere GOK
- Karakalamadahalli GOK
- Maddaianahundi GOK
- Maddur colony AS
- Kunthur HPS GOK
- Tagarapura mole GOK
- Molagan katte GOK
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Chamarajanagara

Carved out of the erstwhile Mysore district in 1998, Chamarajanagara district lies on the leeward side of the Nilgiris and skirts the borders of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Its mixed physiogeography of forested hills and dry plains is bereft of the signs of standard development but is rich in biodiversity. Ranked as one of the poorest districts in the nation, the region is home to four Adivasi groups, the Soliga, Jenu Kuruba, Kadu Kuruba and Yerava, most of whom have been displaced from their forested provenance and are settled in 'colonies' at the edge of newly declared sanctuaries. Like the Adivasis, the Uppara are another community who face the disadvantages of being socially and economically marginal and have low literacy rates. With a literacy rate of only fifty-one percent, the district also lacks institutions of higher education. The Ashramshalas are residential schools catering primarily to the Adivasi and Lambani community.

Contents

L a n g u a g e

- School language, home language
- Speaking & listening
- Reading & writing
- A curriculum framework

School Langauge, Home Language

Many children arrive in school multilingual.
They are happy in both the home language and the school language.

Others, however, arrive with little or negligible degree of comfort in the school language. In spite of this, most children gain proficiency and move ahead and engage with schooling in a new language.

Sobha, Lariya and Lingaraju

Sobha spoke Soliga at home, Lariya Phirdous spoke Urdu and Lingaraju Nayaka's home language was Lambani. All three were also immersed in Kannada in their neighbourhoods. Speaking with friends, accompanying their parents to the market, TV at home all of these experiences were in Kannada.

When these six year olds joined Kannada schools across the district in 2003, they seemed as much at ease with the school language as their Kannada classmates. On a Kannada proficiency test they were as good as the first language speakers. These young multilinguals had arrived in school ready for teacher instructions in the school language.

Raghu and Pradeep

These six year olds were different from Sobha, Lariya and Lingaraju. Raghu came from a Tamil speaking home. He knew no Kannada and was completely lost in the Kannada medium school. Pradeep like Raghu, also knew no Kannada. He too was lost for the first two weeks in school.

Though Raghu and Pradeeep were in different schools they coped with the new language situation in a remarkably similar manner. They showed a burst of vocabulary and by the end of a year were as good as their first language friends. On a Kannada reading test they performed ahead of the class average. These boys are examples of the quick pace at which young children can learn the school language.

Malli

But not all children learn the school language with such ease. Malli only knew Soliga when she joined school. She was quiet and reticent and seemed slow to make friends. She barely spoke with her classmates and her absence of participation was overlooked by the teacher. Malli did not seem to spontaneously gain from opportunities for school language exploration in the play field, during lunch breaks and by reciting songs and poems in the Kannada class.

At the end of two years she had not yet picked up basic Kannada. Her struggle with the school language was evident in her struggle to understand teacher instructions. She, not surprisingly, had difficulty with Kannada reading and writing. By the time she had completed Std. III she had fallen behind by more than two academic years. Her reading level was that of a Std. I child. Malli urgently needed support to cope with spoken and written Kannada.

Speaking & Listening

Children have a finely developed sense of spoken language. Children can hold in memory and manipulate tiny variations in language sounds. They can discern the broad matrix of a complex grammar. They can spontaneously use their language to communicate and express.

Speaking and listening are crucial for all aspects of language learning.

In the community

Not all cultures place speaking and listening at the center of communications. A comparison of two communities highlights the variations. The Soliga community has a very restricted use of the spoken language for interpersonal communication. Members of the community can spend long hours in comfortable silence as they go about their daily chores. At least one study (Devaki, 2004) has documented that Soliga children are not used to talking. In a sense, they do not have the meta-thought that they can use talk to communicate. We do not understand enough about all the nuances of Soliga children's relationship with the spoken word, but it seems reasonable to expect that they do not think of speaking and listening in the same way as many other children. In contrast the Lambanis have a rich oral tradition and community life is full of songs, stories and narratives. Talking and chattering and being the midst of adult conversations is an integral part of children's lives. Speaking and listening have a different status in the lives of the Lambani children when compared to the Soliga children. These preferences become most obvious in the language class. Lambani children are often more responsive to teacher questions and talk more in class in comparison to their Soliga counterparts. Being sensitive to individual preferences and yet encouraging spoken language development in all children is a challenge.

In the classroom

Giving exclusive time for a speaking and listening curriculum is not common. Instead, there is a devalueing of child talk and a reinforcement of a culture of silence within the classroom. The absence of guided practice for spoken langauge skills seems to be closely linked with several adult mindsets. Here are examples of comments we have recorded that reflect these adult orientations to child talk.

“If the child will talk then when will the teacher talk?”

“Children can talk at home. Teachers talk in school.”

“If we allow children to talk there will be noise. We will loose control of the class. There will be no discipline.”

“All children already know how to talk. What is the need to again teach them to talk?”

“This is not the time to sing and talk. It is the time to read and write.”

Reading & Writing

Reading and writing go hand in hand.
Texts capture the stories of a culture and community. They also record information and new knowledge.
When a child learns to decode and understand these texts the child learns to read. When the child learns to write, the child in turn gains the skills of communicating experiences through text.

Learning to read and write do not occur automatically. They must be taught systematically.

At home

What are seven to twelve year olds reading at home? This was a question we asked children in eighteen schools. Five in hundred children said they read storybooks. All other children said they had no story books. They only read their textbooks at home.

“What are the other reading materials you have at home?” we asked. One fifth of the children said they had newspapers at home. Another one fifth spoke about the Bible, Koran and Bhagwathgita they had seen at home. Some of them spoke about the magazines, novels *('kadambarigalu')* and the 'office books' their parents read. One child said, “My older brother and sisters are always reading. The house is full of their story books.”

Eighty percent of the children had not noticed reading materials at home. For them reading was what they did in school, with the school textbook.

At school

“Have you read a story in the last six months?” we asked the same children. Six in ten children said they had not read any story in the last six months.

The children who had read story books had found these books in school more often than at home. We gathered that the most common books were autobiographies of public figures. Children named Nehru, Gandhi and Vishweshwarayya. Few children mentioned names of storybooks.

Where are the books?

More reading is better reading. We started hunting for children's books to bring into the classroom, to encourage children to borrow and read at home. But what became obvious very soon was the dismal absence of children's books in Kannada. While the situation was somewhat better for children who were ten or older, there was very little for the five to ten year olds. We responded to this situation with three programmes:

- developing 100 cards with a team of twelve children's writers and three illustrators. The outcome of this two year effort is the *Chili Pili Cheela*, a bag of language activity cards
- developing local stories with a team of twelve field researchers. This project has narratives about local life with photo illustrations of local scenes.
- encouraging child made books. When children began writing with a clear sense of audience, purpose and topic many interesting texts emerged. These 'books' became a part of the class libraries.

A Curriculum Framework

Early in the project we attempted to articulate the framework that would guide our work.

Simply put, we looked at
language learning as
learning the spoken language and
learning the written language.

We present overleaf our framework for language and literacy development.

Language Development

- Children come to school with considerable language skills which must be taken into account.
- Home language acquisition is not complete by five or six years of age and children continue to learn.
- First language proficiency does not develop as a single, global phenomenon, but different domains develop differently. The linguistic domains include phonology, morphology, lexis, syntax, conversation and discourse.
- Non-dominant language learning would also show differentiated attainments across domains, depending on the quality of stimulation and opportunity for language use.
- There is a connection between children's early exposure to language used in their homes and neighbourhoods and their language development in the different domains.
- Language continues to develop through the early school years.
- To learn discourse skills for example, children need both to participate in discourse and to build up knowledge and skills for participation.

Literacy Development

- Readers and writers need to recognize *akshara*, know how sounds make up words, and use information from the whole text and the context. Successful literacy is the integration of information from each of these processes within the larger process of making sense of the written text.
- The debates between top-down approaches that emphasize making meaning over the lower level skills of word recognition or knowing letter-sound links are artificial and do not help the learners who need it all - the orthographic, phonological and semantic processing skills.
- There is a connection between literacy development and the range of literacy experiences, language education practices and the literacy culture of which the child and teacher are a part.
- The time taken for *akshara* mastery depends on the number of *akshara* to be learnt and how simple the *akshara*-sound relationship is. In Kannada the *akshara*-sound relationship is simple and straightforward but the *akshara* set is large (476).
- To go beyond the simple, stated meanings of the text and look for wider inferences, children need to build up knowledge and skills for seeking coherence in what they read. There is a connection between the child's exposure to variety of texts and genres and the development of their knowledge and skills for meaning making.

Literacy

- *Akshara* knowledge
- Word reading
- Making meaning
- Children's writings
- 'Read Me' Wall

Akshara Knowledge

Learning the *akshara* has many dimensions. The *akshara* sound and the *akshara* symbol have to be learnt. The child must also be able to map sound and symbol onto each other with accuracy and speed.

The challenge of learning the long list of simple and complex *akshara* is that they can all look quite similar.
But most children quickly learn that each *akshara* has certain unique visual features and that there are predictable rules that guide the use of these symbols.

What is learnt first?

A common belief is that children first learn the simple *akshara* and then learn the complex *akshara*.

That is, children first learn ALL the simple *sarala akshara* (*ka, ga, dha*) and then go on to master the *gunita akshara* (*ki, ku, ke*). Once they have finished mastering the *gunita akshara* they begin to master the *voththakshara* (*dhya, sva, ppa*).

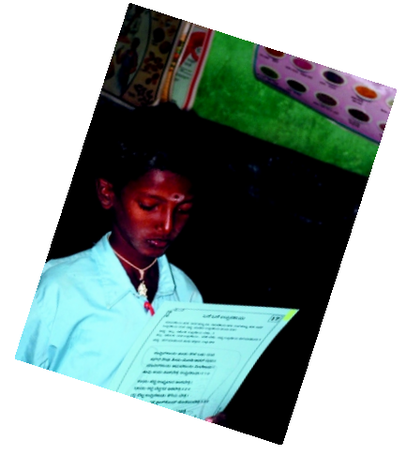
We studied the development of *akshara* mastery in more than 400 children, over three years. What we found was quite different from the common sense assumptions described above.

We did find that children learn *sarala* faster than the *gunita* and that the *voththakshara* is learnt the slowest. But we also found that children begin to learn many **common** *gunita* and *voththakshara* much before they have completely learnt ALL the *sarala akshara*.

Akshara practice

Children do not follow the neatly compartmentalised divisions of first mastering the simple *akshara* and then starting on the complex *akshara*. Instead, they quickly learn the most often encountered *akshara*. The *akshara* that they rarely see in their regular reading are left to be mastered at a later stage.

If this is the learning process, what is the best way for supporting *akshara* practice? Simply doing *akshara* recitation and simultaneous copywriting does not promote *akshara* knowledge. Also, sequencing reading to start only after *akshara* learning is a fragmented approach. Instead, it is best to have *askhara* practice in parallel with *extensive* reading opportunities. Texts can be graded in *akshara* complexity. The more children see *akshara* in different contexts the quicker they will learn.



The school matters

We have conducted quarterly assessments of schools on indicators such as school routine, work culture and teaching-learning processes.
Based on these indicators we separated the 'effective' schools from the ‘low achieving' schools. We looked at the *akshara* learning of children in the two types of schools. We found that children in 'effective' schools were one year ahead of their peers in 'low achieving' schools. This gap was seen in Std. I and remained even at the end of Std. III. Children from ‘low achieving' schools struggled to recognise many more *akshara*.
More importantly, the gains from being in an effective school was seen across all the literacy areas - better word recognition, deeper comprehension and more expressive writing.

Word Reading

Decoding is one way in which children recognise words when reading. Other ways for recognising words are by thinking back on other words that are similar (analogising) and by guessing at what the word might be (predicting). When children have seen the word many times before, they can quickly recall it from memory. This is what has come to be called sight vocabulary.

Many children spontaneously use decoding, analogising, predicting and sight vocabulary to recognise words.

In the beginning however we might find children guessing at words more often or struggling to decode one *akshara* at a time. These strategies can be quite slow and frustrating.

As children grow to become mature readers they seem to judiciously mix strategies to ensure that they successfully recognise all words in the text.

Mahadesh

In Std. I the word '*mara*' was difficult for Mahadesh to read. He could not recognise the *akshara* and preferred not to guess. He simply rejected any attempt at recognising the word. By Std. II Mahadesh was reading words like '*maga*' and '*oota*' with no difficulty. He slowed down when he encountered words like '*swaroopa*' and '*vidya*'. When we met Mahadesh again in Std. III he was reading many, many more words fluently. When stuck with a new word that he could not quickly decode, he guessed at what the word might be. After having read further into the sentence, if he found the guessed word to be wrong, he came back to re-attempt the word. He was spontaneously using repair strategies for words he had wrongly identified.

Mallesha Nayak

Guessing is the preferred strategy for recognising words for Mallesha. He does not know all the *akshara* so it is difficult for him to use a *akshara-by-akshara* decoding process. He also avoids reading so there are very few other equivalent words that he can compare new words with. So analogising is also not an often used strategy. Now in Std. V, he rarely reads and we are seeing a plateuing off of his sight vocabulary. Mallesha now urgently needs one-to-one attention and a clear remedial programme

Nagarathnabai

Nagarathnabai was already reading many words when she was in Std. I. Her teacher-mother told us that she used to read Lambani stories to Nagarathna in the evenings after she came home from the anganwadi. Nagarathna watched her aunt poring over research papers and fat books. When Nagarathna joined school, the Kannada *akshara* was not so alien and she quickly learnt many of the *sarala akshara (*simple *akshara).* When we met her again in Std. III she showed an agility in switching between word recognition strategies that many of her seniors were still waiting to master.

Making Meaning

The purpose of reading is comprehension.
At the simplest level the 'situation' in the text needs to be constructed. At a more complex level there is a need to go beyond what is explicitly expressed in the text.
Meaning making is thus a multi-layered and complex exercise.

Children differ in the extent to which they read for understanding.
Children also differ in the diligence with which they monitor their comprehension of a text.

In order to make meaning of a text children have to make connections across ideas presented in the text. They also have to fill in gaps because the text does not always clearly state all the connections.

Making connections and filling gaps is straight forward and easily worked out when the material is simple.
As reading materials become more complicated in length and narration, constructing meaning becomes more demanding. The reader has to be alert and monitor that all connections and gaps have been accurately attended to.

Classes 3,4 and 5

We asked children from eighteen government schools and ashramashala to read a selection of ten short texts. The texts were varied and described, among other themes, the travels of Fathima, the plight of a little Raakshasa, a description of the nine planets and Sir Vishweshwarayya's work life.

In every class there were children who showed exceptional skills for reading comprehension.
In Std. III, we found one in ten children reading at the comprehension level of Std. V.
In Std. V, almost one third of the children were actively monitoring their comprehension for complex passages that required considered inferences.

But, nearly one fourth of the children were simply not connecting with the text. In Std. III and IV children missed simple links between ideas in the text. At the end of Std. 5, one in ten children were still reading mechanically, parroting the words but not gathering the meaning.

The quality of opportunity

Children in school today are rarely required to go beyond a surface connection of ideas. Comprehension questions asked in the text books, class tests and during lessons are factual and demand only simplistic inferences. Voracious readers make up for the absence of complexities through immersion in literature and readings outside the textbook. But most of our children are not voracious readers. They have little opportunity to practice deeper inferential processes for comprehension. Indeed, many children seem to be carrying away the message that there is rarely a need to delve deeper. They are missing reading between the lines…

Children's Writing

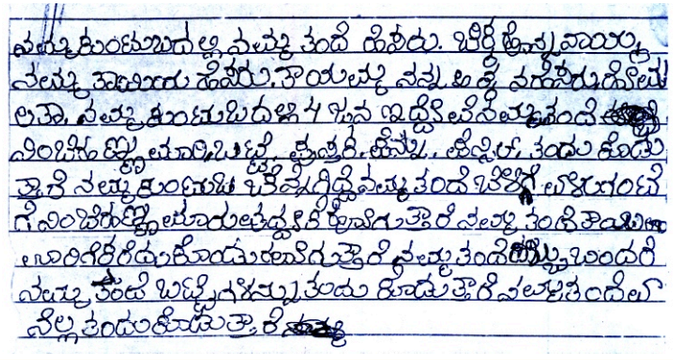
Written expressive language must be differentiated from the mechanics of writing (handwriting).
In this section we focus on expressive writing.

Writing to communicate ideas requires a sense of audience. Throughout the years of primary school, children develop a better understanding of how other people think and function. This aspect of emotional and social development will impact on their ability to write.

Expressive writings have a clear sense of audience, purpose and topic. The process of writing text for an audience nurtures the idea of working on several drafts, editing each in the course of producing a final version that is ready for others to read. It is such a process that would allow children to learn the mechanics of expressive writing and slowly internalize the features of written text

We reproduce here a sample of children's writings.

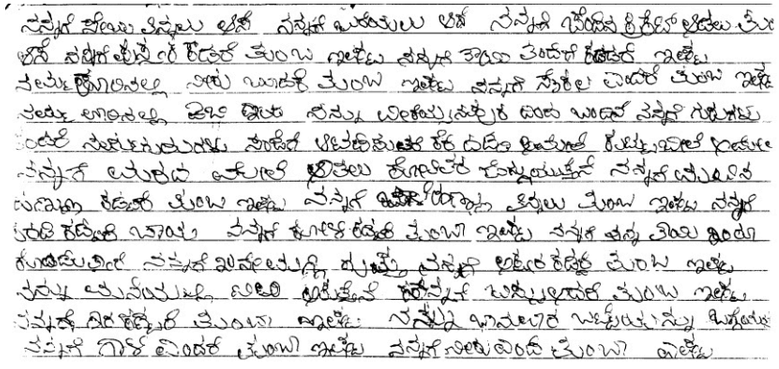
My family



In my family my father's name is Chikkahonna Nayaka. My mother's name is Thayamma. Sister's name is Hemalatha. There are four people in my family. My father sells lemons and buys books, pens, pencils. Our family is fine. My father goes daily at 7 am to sell lemons. My parents take me out of station. Whenever there is any festival, my father buys new clothes. What all my father brings!

C. Ramya, Std. V

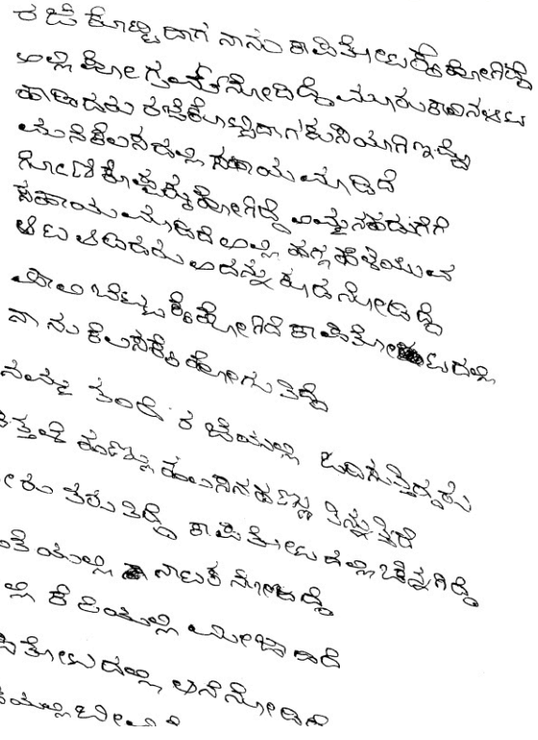
What I like?



I like to eat apples. I like to write. I like to play cricket with a ball. I like books very much. I like my father and mother very much. My teacher plays with us. We play *keredada* (in the pond on the bank), *kuntobilla* (hopscotch) and swing from the branches... I like to wash clothes on Sundays.

Arun Nayaka, Std. IV

What I did during my vacations



During my holidays, I went to coffee plantations. I watched programmes there. We played three legged game and songs. During my holidays I was happy. I helped at home. Went to Gonikuppa. Helped mother with cooking. There they played rope winding game. I watched....

Chaitra, Std. V

'Read me' Wall

We have encouraged partner schools to start class libraries.

One wall in every classroom is made into a 'Read me' Wall (Nanna Odu Gode). On prominent display is the Chili Pili Cheela, the pack of language cards. The wall also displays children's writings and sometimes teacher-made books.

Duggati Primary School

There are two 'Read me' Walls in the classrooms here, reflecting the two languages being learnt in school. One wall - the *Nanna Odu Gode* - has all the children's writings in Kananda. The display on the opposite wall is called *Read Me Wall*. This section is for children's writings in English. Teachers tell us that the Wall works very well for encouraging children to write in both languages.

Publishing Skills

In some schools we were dismayed to find that the displays on the 'Read me' Wall were the product of mechanical copywriting from library books and textbooks. There were no original works on the wall! But in other schools children had been given the time and encouragement to write down their thoughts, make drafts, illustrate and make the final 'books' for publishing.

Janapada Jagathu

For one year during the project we had attempted to introduce a time in the monthly calender when elders and resource persons from the local communities would be invited into the classrooms to share their folktales and stories. The idea seemed to be sound on paper but did not take root on the ground. Schools found it difficult to find time for such sessions. Village elders and resource persons were shy and reticent to sing and narrate their songs in the formal academic environment of the school.
There is however a clear need to build bridges between the school and home cultures.
One possibility is to encourage child- and teacher-made books about local stories for the 'Read me' Wall.
What failed as a spoken language exposure to the world of folktales can perhaps be captured for the child through written language.


ಎನಿದು ಶೆಟ್ಟಿ? ಬಾಗಿಲು ತೆಗೆಯಲೇ ಬೇಡವೆನೋ?
ಬಾಗಿಲು ತೆಗೆದಳು.

L e a r n i n g

- Sing song lessons
- Unchallenged truisms
- Teaching practice
- Teacher and student talk

Sing Song lessons

Reciting the aksharamale and the multiplication tables in unison... the sing song lesson is a common practice in our classrooms.

Perhaps the roots of the sing song lesson is the chanting practice that has kept alive a rich oral tradition of epics, prayers and commentaries.

The sing song lesson keeps all children engaged in class. But do they learn?

The child's introduction to the sing song lesson begins early. Anganwadis and preschools have sing song lessons for poems and action songs.

By Std. I and II the sing song lesson has been used in language and math classes. By Std. III and IV the method is being used for learning concepts.

Many children join in enthusiastically during a sing song lesson.
Such a lesson usually leaves an onlooker with the impression that the class is obedient, engaged and learning.

Pallavibai

We saw her sing along with her class. She seemed to know all the akshara. But when we met her again that afternoon for assessment the story was quite different. She could sing the *aksharamale,* but could not identify the *akshara*. When presented with 'ga' she started the song ra, ga, sa, da, na. 'This is 'na", she said. The *aksharamale* recitation had acquainted Pallavi with all the *akshara* sounds but had not taken her to the next step of matching the sounds to the written *akshara.* Pallavi had a long way to go with recognition of the *akshara*, and this would slow down her reading development.

Dennis

All children had their books open. The teacher read out the first sentence, all children diligently looked at the page and repeated the sentence after her. The teacher then read out the next sentence and the children followed. Dennis could stay enthusiastically engaged with such an exercise for the entire lesson. When we later picked up the same chapter for him to read, he was able to quickly run through the text. He recalled the complete lesson verbatim but his fingers proved to be the traitor. As he narrated the text, the right hand finger was pointing to the wrong words! Dennis had committed the whole lesson to memory but he could not 'read' the lesson.

Upendra

The teacher had been called away to attend to visitors. She had left the class under the care of a bright *hiremani* (the class monitor). The monitor was very clear about what he had to do. He wanted the class to 'revise' the morning's lesson. He asked all children to stand in neat rows. He asked them to fold their hands, look in front and repeat after him as he read out from the book. This is how he and most of his friends studied at home. They read the lesson out loud. "The more you read out loud, the more you will remember." "But what if you do not understand what you read," we asked. Upendra was puzzled. This question had never crossed his mind.

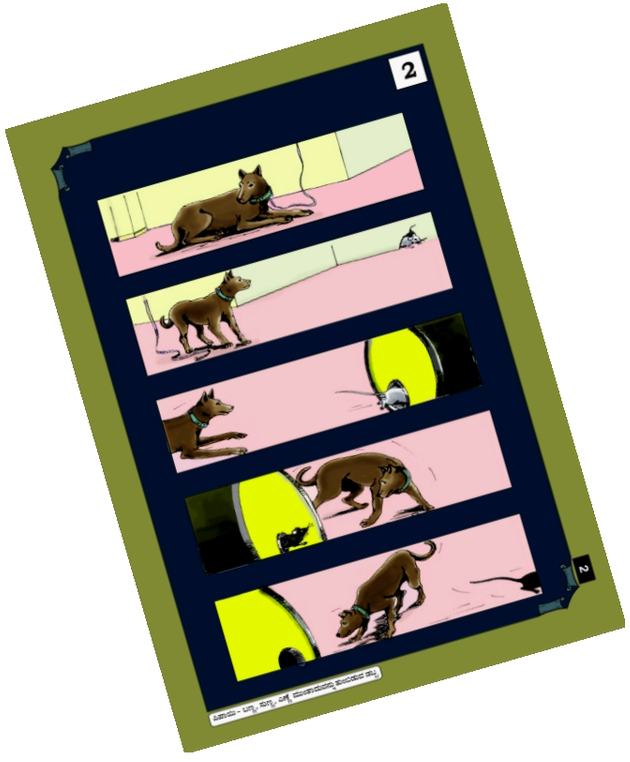
Unchallenged Truisms

A wide range of adults make decisions about what must be on offer in school. Many of these adults are known within the school system as officials, experts, consultants and resource persons.

What happens if these key adults are out of touch with the child's world? Unexpected truisms begin to gain force. If left unchallenged, these truisms can gain the stature of being 'facts', enter school life in many subtle ways and limit opportunities for learning.

Here we share three debates recorded during the review of our reading materials. All three debates were with adults who were key decision makers in choosing children's textbooks and learning materials.

Examples of questions raised by these key persons were :
What is 'good' for children?
What are the things that children 'can do', 'cannot do'?



Children will not know that!

What is smaller than an ant? This was the question asked in one of our reading cards. 'How can 7 and 8 year olds know the answer?,' the committee asked. 'These children have not yet been taught about mitochondria, amoeba and cell.' We were instructed to 'Drop the question'.
But how had children responded to the question? One child had said, 'Sugar!' Another had piped in, 'Ragi!' A third had added quietly, 'Baby ant.' Children clearly knew how to deal with the size question even though the world knowledge they used did not include micro-organisms. Would the adult world view accommodate the child's answers as valid and knowledgeable?

It is a burden for children!

'The 100 cards must only have words that are there in the Textbook. We do not want to burden the child.' These comments left the group of children's writers startled. An alternate point of view was presented: 'The 100 cards promote new vocabulary through a range of genres and a wide variety of themes that are known to interest children.' The person who raised the question did not seem altogether convinced.

Children need it simple!

A comic strip shows a big dog chasing a small white rat that enters through one end of a barrel but slips out from the other end, leaving the dog wondering about the rat's disappearance. A careful look at the illustrations shows that the escape was made possible because the grease in the barrel had turned the rat black and it had run out right under the nose of the dog waiting for a white rat. "Too many concepts - big and small, white and black. Also dogs do not chase rats, cats do. Change the comic", we were instructed. The rejection also seemed to be because of the many layers of meaning making that this text asked of the child. The card was a departure from simplistic texts, breaking the assumption that children at this age cannot deal with complexities in language.
We disagreed and the card was not dropped!

Teaching Practice

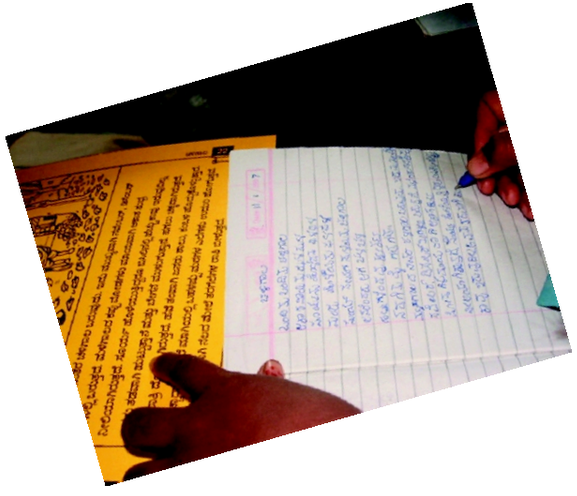
Numerous attitudes and assumptions shape teaching practice.

Thus there may be different ways in which the *akshara* is taught or children's 'own' answers are graded.

When an alternate literacy and language programme is introduced, the first expectation is that the programme would be supported by corresponding changes in teaching practice - earlier routines will be adapted to incorporate new approaches to teaching and learning.

Crucial moments of change

Over the four project years, many different experiences supported teachers' decisions to try new ideas. Some teachers told us they were convinced to try new ideas after practice sessions, others felt confident after demonstration classes. For some teachers the 'change moments' occurred many weeks after the close of the training programme. We capture here two personal experiences that heralded positive changes within the classroom:



The theme was 'sound games'. We had discussed the role played by auditory skills in learning new vocabulary and spelling long words. Some teachers felt strongly that sound games were more appropriate for *anganwadis*. When the group met again after two months, one teacher had become a firm advocate of the games. He said, " I tried it with my eight year old. It worked. She enjoyed it, she learnt new words and her teacher was happy. I then decided to use the games in class for my students." A personally meaningful experience had propelled change.

One year later we were working with teachers who had volunteered to be Master Trainers. They were to learn about language and literacy practices and then conduct a workshop for their colleagues. Two days before the workshop one Master Trainer decided to read all the programme materials 'seriously' before he conducted his workshop. He later told us that he became convinced about the need to change only when he sat down to re-work the entire teaching programme in his own words. "Till that moment they were your ideas. Now this is my idea".

Slipping back to old routines

We also met reluctant teachers, tired teachers and resistant teachers. For many of them practicing old routines was comfortable. They preferred to keep out alternate ideas from entering into their classrooms. We list here some routines that continue to nudge out alternate ideas:

- class displays should be with neatly copied poems and stories rather than with children's own stories, jottings and illustrations
- use of reading cards should be teacher dictated rather than self chosen
- keeping children 'busy' is best with mechanical copywriting rather than self guided reading activities
- responding to one child's questions should be to the whole class rather than quietly with the individual child
- managing a class should be to ensure silent work rather than talking and discussing with each other.

Teacher Student Talk

Much of what happens in class is shaped by the talk that occurs between teachers and students.

In a sense, teachers who talk children through the steps of doing something new are giving children words to label their new experience.
Children gain a language for communicating their difficulties, successes and failures.

Teacher-child talk supports both concept and skill learning.

Some teachers listen to what students say and some students listen to what teachers say. But too often this may not happen. Teacher talk can occur in isolation without connecting with the child. When this happens effective learning may not be actively supported.

Banuvaadi

Teacher: Now, to call *Banuvaadi* a good village, what facilities should it have? Who will tell?
Students: no response
Teacher: (repeats question thrice)
Students: no response
Teacher: Maninayaka tell
Maninayaka: no response
Teacher: Who will tell? Kantu?
Kantu: no response
Teacher: Don't you all know, what you need? Drinking water. What?
Students (chant in unison): Drinking water.
Teacher: Then?
Students: Air…
Teacher: No air, it is common and everywhere, nobody needs to give us. Then?
Students: Trees…
Teacher: No. Not tree. Road… road. Repeat after me… what to you need…what do you need?
Students (chant in unison): Road.

Could the teacher have changed his interaction style. Could he have given clues earlier in the session? Could he have shown praise when the first responses started coming from the class (air, trees) rather than ignoring these hesitant first steps? Perhaps one way to highlight the absence of 'real talk' between teacher and child is to capture such transactions and bring them into the classroom for discussion and analysis.

Here is an example of another interaction between the same teacher and students. This time we can see the two are listening to each other and responding to each other.

Akbar & Poonooregowda

Teacher: Aan! Who is Akbar?`
Students: Chakravarthi
Teacher: Why do they call him *chakravarthi?*
Students: no response
Teacher: Think of your *gram panchayat*. Which is your *gram panchayat*? (thrice)
Students: Chamarajanagara
Teacher: Your *gram panchayat* has a different name. Who'll tell? Ayeh!
Students: no response
Teacher: Punajanooru isn't it? Which one?
Students: Punajanooru
Teacher: Do you know who the president of *gram panchayat* is?
Students: Poonooregowda
Teacher: Aan! Poonooregowda. In the same way, Akbar was a king for a state. So he was called *chakravarthi.* Why was he called *chakravarthi*? Why was Akbar called *charakravarthi*?
Students: Because he was the king of a state.

End Note

The Human Development Report (UNDP, 1997) identified three factors to arrive at an aggregate judgement of the extent of poverty in a community: longevity, decent standard of living and knowledge. Knowledge is defined as inclusion into the world of reading and communication.

Learning to read: The long term implications

- Children who can read are less likely to drop out from school.
- Being able to read reduces unemployment and in fact enhances the quality of employment.
- Individuals who complete more years of schooling and who have better reading ability are more likely to be employed, to have accumulated more months of employment and to hold jobs of higher complexity than individuals with less education and/or lower reading ability levels.

Where does India stand?

- Over half of the world's illiterates may be in India as we enter the 21st century.
- India is one of the countries (along with the Arab states and sub-Saharan Africa) where the literacy levels are still below the threshold level of 75%.

However, despite numerous almost overwhelming problems, India's literacy has been steadily improving. At the time of independence India's literacy rate was only 14% and female literacy was abysmally low at 8%. It grew to 36% in 1981 and in 1991 it was 52% (males 65%, females 39%). What will the numbers be in 2011?

A good reader is someone who…

- is able to recognise the sounds that letters make and the words that emerge when letters come together
- reads with the intention of understanding and approaches the reading with that purpose in mind
- uses specific tactics to understand what is being read
- self-observes to ensure that what is read is understood and if need be, makes adjustments in reading tactics
- has word attack strategies to deal with unfamiliar words and make sense of what is being read
- is constantly linking what is being read with their other experiences and to the world around
- is anticipating and predicting what will come next as words blend into sentences, sentences into paragra

To help a person realise these objectives lies at the heart of an effective reading programme.