

Thulir

Newsletter – January 05

Greetings from Sittilingi.

It's been a while since our last news update. Meanwhile much has been happening and this is part of the reason why we haven't posted an update.

Visit to Nagapattinam, post Tsunami:

We cannot but start with a note on the tragic tsunami that struck, among other places, the Tamilnadu coast. The two of us went to Nagapattinam, which is the most affected area in the state, to help in the post Tsunami rehab work. A network of NGOs had come together to coordinate relief activities and also to make recommendations to the Govt on the shelter and livelihood rehab policy. We spent from 6th of Jan to 13th of Jan there and worked on the temporary shelters. Some of you might have received our detailed report on this visit. We can send you the same if you are interested. Please let us know.



Poetry sessions:

Moving on to the regular Thulir activities, we introduced "cinquain", a French form of poetry that we read about, to the children. Cinquain is a five line poetry form where the first line is a single word that represents an object which is the subject of the poem; the second line of two words which are adjectives; the third line of three words, are verbs which describe actions that can be attributed to the subject; the fourth line has four words describing how the poet feels about the subject and the fifth line is a one word that conveys the sense of the first word. For example

*Butterfly
Delicate, graceful
Flutters, finds, sips
Seems weak but isn't
Beauty*

They found it easier to write with this form. It was interesting to find that even children who were normally diffident about writing became enthusiastic and wrote creatively about simple commonplace things like vegetables!!

The Nature Calendar:

One of the interesting ideas we came across was to do a calendar where

observations from nature are recorded during different months of the year. We started with the Tamil month of Karthigai [nov-dec], and were simply amazed at the list the children made effortlessly of flowers that bloom this month.

Artwork:

This has become a rather regular and fairly spontaneous activity. Children have become less self-conscious and more daring to try newer ideas in drawing and painting. We now have a comfortable amount of art supplies thanks to Dr. Carolyn Lomas, who has painstakingly collected supplies donated by friends of Sittilingi over the whole year and has carted it all the way from England. Dr. Carolyn Lomas worked in the Sittilingi hospital for a year and now visits us every year for 2 months.



What did I learn in Thulir?

We wanted to take stock and see what kind of learning has happened since Thulir started. We thought we would like to ask the children themselves to come up with what they have learnt. Of course it was mainly a listing and also sometimes too vague ["I learnt math"]. But it was an interesting exercise and we felt that at least the children seem to perceive that they are learning something. This is significant as our methods are seen by most adults as "playing" and learning is often associated, even by the children, only formal classroom instruction. The list also gave us an opportunity to see the range of learning that has happened. We left the exercise at this stage for the present, as we are still apprehensive about doing any kind of evaluation that might be seen by the children as a "test".

We have also been worrying if children have learnt enough in Thulir sessions and whether more emphasis on traditional language and math skills should have been emphasized upon. An interesting thing happened a couple of days ago. A couple of children who had come initially but had dropped out suddenly reappeared. They took a very simple jigsaw puzzle with square pieces and found it really difficult to put them together. In comparison the children who have been regular solve fairly complicated puzzles with ease now. So all these sessions have had some impact.

Learning materials from England:

There has been much excitement in Thulir as we unwrapped a number of new materials that Dr. Carolyn Lomas has brought. Much of it is very useful in the context of English and Math learning, besides being well designed and well made. Already the children have taken enthusiastically to using them.



It was interesting to see that children helped with the unpacking and stacking/arranging of the materials. In the initial months a lot of our time and effort went in arranging materials in their right places. Now the children take the responsibility of taking care of the materials and make sure they go back to their right place after an activity is over.

Gardening:

Mohan has planted a plot of tapioca in a 4m by 4 m plot. Others have added a couple of more plants to this plot. There is much excitement watching these plants come up. So far it has been well looked after.

Paper models

A popular Tamil childrens magazine has been attaching paper model sheets as inserts with elaborate instructions to cut and paste them. These are well made with many complicated parts and instructions. Some time back the children took them up to make them and we were surprised that many could read the complicated instructions, understand them and patiently make the models.

Riddles collected and written down by children

Children have collected riddles from elders in the village and compiled and written them down. Riddles are very popular among the children and obviously, it is very much a part of their tradition. So the children find riddles and oral puzzles interesting and easy to relate to. In fact very interestingly, one of our students who finds math problems in the text book difficult and usually struggles with them, found fairly complicated traditional math puzzle easy to solve!

Visitors:

Anita Balasubramanian's visits have been regular since we moved to Sittilingi. Apart from taking sessions with the children, her visits provide valuable inputs and we get a lot of useful feedback too.

Our friends Ute [a medical doctor], Karl, [a planner], their two children, Kristine [a school teacher] and her daughter Frauke all visited us during the Christmas break. They were happy to interact with the Thulir children teaching them songs and folk dances. The children enjoyed the sessions. They brought new footballs too, so after the monsoon break, football playing is back in Sittilingi.



Anuradha and Krishna