

Thulir

Newsletter – July 04

Greetings from Sittilingi.

This is a summary of July's activities at Thulir....hope you don't find it too detailed and long. We thought this would help us to document our progress.

Here at Thulir, July was a good month. The children have been coming more regularly now ; our activities are taking better shape; we are also getting to know the children better. Consequently, the children have understood basic ground rules, [such as to keep whatever things they take back in their proper places, to share material in a group, etc.] and we can now introduce more materials. Coming from a background of deprivation [of educational materials, books etc.] some children still have fear handling unfamiliar books, materials etc.. This would take more time.

Senthil's Classes:

Senthil, was appearing for re-examination in 2 subjects of the class 10 State examination. He was interested in getting help to prepare for this .

Consequently for 5 weeks till July 10th, we coached him in special classes every day. He used the Thulir space to study for long hours of the day and we took classes 3 times a day [beginning at 6 am] for him. Though he has finished his exams, he is now a regular to Thulir as he has an interest in learning. He is intelligent but rebellious and has often got into trouble at School, and finds it difficult to motivate himself in the "memorise everything and write exams" pattern of education.

Malaithangi children

The village of Malaithangi sends its children to the Sittilingi Govt school. These children walk the 3 kms distance everyday to and from the school. Though initially we only invited the Sittilingi parents to send their children to Thulir, the Malaithangi children had been watching the activities at Thulir every evening. Slowly one by one they asked if they too could come and eventually now, about 20 children come regularly now. They come straight after the school closes, and are the first children to come to Thulir. They also leave earlier than the other children as they have to walk a longer distance and would like to reach home before it gets dark.

On a typical day, as mentioned earlier, the malaithangi village children come in first at around 4 pm. They are followed by the younger Sittilingi children who go to the Govt School, usually between 4.45 and 5.15 pm. The older Sittilingi children who go to the Kottapatti private and Govt. schools then come between 5.30 and 6.00 pm. The older boys like to play football from 6 to 6.45 pm or so. They come in then to have classes till 7.45p.m.

The children do a 10 minute yoga session, and much to our surprise enjoy it. We have collected a fair amount of story books that can be read by children of different reading proficiencies. Initially we simply handed out the material and encouraged them to read. But we found that though a lot of children [especially the older ones], can read Tamil fluently, and some of them even English, their comprehension is very poor. We also found many children were wary of taking books on their own to read. So we started reading sessions where we read out the stories. The stories that are read out become very popular and children often demand repetitive readings, which we oblige as repeated reading will help them to start recognising words and phrases and help in comprehension.

General Awareness

A regular activity is reading out from Newspapers everyday. We do this to improve their awareness of what is happening around them. This also is helpful in improving their language skills. This has tremendous possibilities as one can integrate History, Geography, Geology etc into ordinary newspaper stories.

Art sessions

We encourage children to draw and colour using crayons and water colours. We find that most children who draw have been conditioned to draw typical scenes and objects and have been thus schooled. The older children have a lot of resistance to drawing and painting. We have tried to remedy this by encouraging them to just explore colours, paint different colours with simple brush strokes etc., and such similar simple exercises, to break them out of their habits. As can be expected, we have had more success with the younger children who haven't yet been



schooled properly. Anita Balasubramanian's session on making hand puppets when she visited Thulir last week has been a big hit. It has taken off and has spread to other children who missed the session with Anita.

The village festival

This year Sittilingi had good rains after 4 years of bad monsoon and so the village decided to revive the temple festival which had not been held all these years. The preparations and the excitement of the festivities lasted much of the month. Though the children dropped out for many days during the summer when there were rains and other disruptions, this time they came for classes even on days of the festival, which shows a positive sign of interest on their part.

Spoken English Exercises

We have started sessions on spoken English as this has been a major demand from the children, especially of the Govt. School children. Being a foreign language which they don't hear in their day to day life, this is an uphill task. Especially as their command over Tamil itself is so poor one is torn between correcting their Tamil and improving their English. Guess, we will have to do both.

Mohan

Mohan is appearing for class 10 exams this year. He is a bright boy who is interested in studies and in knowing about happenings in the world. Unfortunately, he suffers from a severe heart disease, a condition where there is no possibility of corrective surgery/ treatment. He is on medicines and cannot exert himself too much and has been taken off school. He is a regular at Thulir and comes in the evening after his work at the STD booth gets over. He loves to play football with the other kids and we have to restrain him to standing at the goal and not run around too much.

Butterflies

July is also the annual butterfly season. There is a profusion of butterflies and so we spent a couple of sessions talking about butterflies and observing them.

Of the learning materials we have, there is one where there are several pairs of pictures mounted on cards. These can be used to first match the correct pairs for younger children and later to use for memory games [by keeping the cards face down and picking correct pairs to score]. This one set has become very popular and there is great demand. So one day we handed out waste cardboard pieces in pairs to the children and asked them to draw their own pairs. So now we have two sets of cards to play with.

Sessions with parents:

We had a sessions with young parents [with children in the 1-6 age group], to discuss how children learn. These are staff at the Tribal Health Initiative who hail from the villages around and a few from outside the area. We basically discussed how parents can play an active part in creating the right environment at home for the children to learn. We discussed possible material that could help in children's learning. The response was good and it was decided to have monthly sessions. Immediately after the sessions some of the parents visited Thulir with their children, and borrowed books for the under 5 children who go to the balwadi run for the staff children.

Contact with the local Govt. school teachers

Two Govt. teachers working at the Sittilingi school visited Thulir. They appear to be sincere [the unusual types who are staying in the village and

attending the school regularly]. Apart from that they have severe limitations, having to manage all classes by themselves, and being well equipped with subject knowledge. Nowadays if they come across "difficult problems" that they cannot do in maths, they send it with their students who attend Thulir, for our help in solving!

We look forward to an eventful August too and will get back to you with more news in Sept.

Till then,
With Best wishes

Anu and Krishna