

Child Education

July/August 2008

Our second project was centered on child education. Schooling in Tripura is provided free of cost by the government all the way up to grade 12, however some parents from poorer families find less value in their children's schooling and more benefit in their assistance with household chores and farm work. Our project was targeted at this population of parents whose children were not currently attending school. **The goals behind this project** were to help our students understand the importance of education themselves and then have them transfer that knowledge to the parents of schooling-deprived children in their community.

Our students from grades 1–3 participated in this project. They visited families neighboring the school premises and interacted with parents and children, engaging them in dialogue on the subject of child education and collecting vital information that would go on to guide and drive the students' action plan.

Planning

Forming groups

Students were divided into groups consisting of 5 to 6 students. Each group chose a name for themselves such as honesty, kindness, etc. The students, facilitated by their class teacher, started delegating individual responsibilities to their group members. These responsibilities ranged from being a 'presenter' to 'documenter' to 'leader', among others.

Identifying the location for action

Students and teachers engaged in group consultation (large group) to identify localities for the project to take place. The following questions were discussed:

- Are there any children in our town who do not attend school?
- What can be the reasons behind a child not attending school?
- Should we identify families whose children do not go to school?
- In which locality should we conduct this project? Why?

Research and study on the problem

After studying some facts, statistical data and research documents on child illiteracy – simplified and presented by the teacher – the students engaged in a small group discussion on this subject. Below are some recorded ideas shared by the students:

What is child education?

“To teach children”

“To take care of children”

“To teach good manners”

What is the importance of child education?

“Children won't behave as human beings without it”

“They will not listen to their parents”

“They will not earn enough money, if they don't study”

Students then planned to make home visits to families in the targeted locality in order to gather more first-hand information on the issue. A simple questionnaire was prepared by the teachers in order to assist students in collecting relevant data from parents/children from the targeted households. At the same time students were involved in preparing presentations (in small groups) that they would share with the visited families, imparting information about the importance of child education and some means by which parents might be able to receive financial support from the government in order to send their children to school. These presentations were first shared with peers and volunteer parents in order to receive feedback which would be used to further enhance the final draft of the presentation.

Action

On 9th August, 2008, all the students and volunteer parents gathered at the school at 2.30 p.m. Each group, supervised by an adult, set out to meet the targeted families they were assigned. Some of the families visited were the same ones involved in the last project (plantation) and our students were happy to check on the trees they planted previously. From their interactions with parents and children, our students concluded that most of the visited families could not afford to send their children to school because of the cost of making uniforms, buying books, etc. The children from these households told our students that their families were “too poor” and “without money” and hence could not afford school. Some local children simply stated that they “would not like to go to school”. The students proceeded to make presentations to the visited families describing the importance of child education and some means by which the families might be able to avail of financial support from the government in order to send their children to school.

Reflection/Evaluation

As the students carried out reflection exercises in small and large groups, the following ideas were recorded:

What were our successes?

“We showed respect towards parents”

“We helped each other in our groups to carry out the project”

“We asked questions turn-wise (one at a time)”

“We learnt how to interact appropriately with different adults”

“We realized that some families are poor and some are rich.”

Areas for improvement:

“We should not shout while we are in the village”

“We forgot to knock on the door before entering some homes.”

The supervising parents that came along on the service day felt that this project was better planned and executed than the previous one. Below are some comments recorded by the volunteer parents:

“This kind of project will assist our children to understand their academic subjects in a better manner.”

“Role plays can be a useful tool to better prepare students in their interactions with families”

“Essential social skills will be acquired by our children through such projects.”

“I am quite satisfied with their (students’) approach to work, togetherness and cooperation. I think they are treading down the right path.”

“Through such activities, our children will be able to develop their critical thinking skills and the spiritual qualities which they are learning about at school.”

“Socialization is an important objective of education, and the children are given the opportunity to practice the associated skills through such projects”

Though the parents were full of praise for the project, they were also concerned about the unruly behavior of some students during family visits. This is one area in which great improvement is expected in future projects.

The teachers too believed that there was a significant improvement in project planning and execution when compared to the previous project.

“The students have done their part quite well. They tried hard to adjust with unexpected circumstances during family visits.”

“This time, many of the group members (students) found their own way to the targeted homes and started asking questions to the family members without any adult assistance.”

The teachers also felt that this project was much more complex than the previous one, and keeping this in mind they were quite satisfied with the performance of the students. They found that the students’ communication skills were improving and that they were showing increased respect to the villagers. One teacher remarked that this time the students gave more preference to their group’s achievement in comparison to their individual successes.

Project at a Glance

Number students participated :	88
Number of Groups:	15
Number of Localities:	03
Number of visited families:	39
Number of schooling-deprived children met:	52
Number of parents volunteered:	19
Number of teachers involved:	08

Cross-curricular benefits of the project

Science: Students learned about the harmful consequences of illiteracy, especially dealing with health.

Social Studies: Students studied the names and functions of the different local agencies responsible for the education of children.

Mathematics: Students used their counting, addition, multiplication and division skills learned during math class, while planning and tallying their outreach to families and individuals in the community.

Literacy: Students enhanced their written and verbal communication skills through the preparation and delivery of their presentations to the families visited.

Arts: Students made artistic representations of their project before and after its execution.

Spiritual development: Students practiced being polite, courteous, cooperative, patient, and humble throughout the project. Further, they better understood their responsibility to serve the community and experienced the joy that comes with it.

Social/emotional skills: Students learned how to work effectively in groups and they developed an attitude of cooperation. They also increased their self-confidence and skills of communication by interacting with adults and children.

Conclusion

In addition to all that is stated above, the project helped to bring parents, teachers, students, and the local community together in acknowledging and working towards an issue that affects them all. The students not only reinforced their classroom study of various subjects but also learned about the benefits of working cooperatively and systematically in general. More importantly, the community and students were both equally benefitted by the project.