

Plantation

June 2008:

This project germinated from group discussions held during the daily study of My Moral Book which is our school's Spiritual Development curriculum comprised of lesson-wise arrangements of prayers, holy-writings, moral stories, art ideas, cooperative games, and other activities relevant to the theme of each lesson being studied.

In brief the service project, described in more detail below, involved planting litchi trees in the homes of families located around the School campus. The participants in this project were students of Classes 1 – 3 (6 – 9 yr olds), some volunteering parents, our entire school staff, and the families we visited in the neighboring community.

Planning

Making groups and leaders – Every class made 5 groups of 5 students each. Both, the teacher and students were involved in the formation of groups. Below are some observations made by the teachers during this process:

"Initially, the students were self-centered. Each of them wanted to be the 'group-leader'. When asked for volunteers they all raised their hands simultaneously! However, after some thought they realized that only one person per group could assume this responsibility while the rest could contribute in different ways. The members of each group choose their own group-leader. Through this exercise we observed that the students learnt to sacrifice their own desire to be leader for the sake of their group."

Another teacher added, "And, when we asked them why they chose a particular group member to be leader, they said because that peer was 'helpful' and 'well behaved'."

Visit by an expert from the area's Horticulture Dept, Agriculture Office – Students extended a warm welcome to Mr. Subrata Das at School. He began by speaking in brief on the history of the litchi tree and the different types of litchi trees planted all over India. He went on to explain, step by step, what needed to be done in order to grow a healthy and beautiful tree. Students took notes while Mr. Das was talking and they even asked questions such as, "Sir, how deep should we dig before placing the litchi sapling in?", "Why is this tree so important?" "Why do we need to use insecticide with soil and manure?", "How much water does this tree need".



Mr. Das seemed impressed with the curiosity of the students and their eagerness to learn.

Drawings – After a brief discussion on the agenda for the project, students were asked to make drawings of what they visualized the plantation activity to be like. This exercise helped them express their views and ideas through a medium removed from language allowing the teachers a deeper insight into the students' pre-conceived notions regarding the task at hand.

They drew themselves digging the soil, watering the sapling and building a fence around their plantation.

Involving parents - During the last parent-teacher meeting 15 parents volunteered to join the service project and accompany the children in their community service efforts. The student groups then presented their plans to the volunteers. The parents were very impressed with the strategies and preparations made by the children.

Action

On the day of the plantation activity the student groups, volunteering parents and teachers first gathered together at School and prayed for the success of the project. Route maps of the families to be visited were given to each group and its assistant adult. Teachers had already visited these families previously in order to receive their permission and participation in our project.



As the groups reached their assigned homes, one student (chosen by the group) shared the purpose of their visit. The family would then show them to the backyard where they wished to have the tree planted. The students went to work in a systematic manner since each of them was assigned a role in advance. They dug, planted, covered and watered the sapling and proceeded to educate the family on how to care for the tree. Finally, they thanked the families for their support and returned to school for an evaluation session.



Some observations shared by the families visited were, "the students performed their duties with great joy, even singing while they worked together", "I was impressed with the introductory presentation made by the student, the purpose of their visit became quite clear to me".

Evaluation

While some groups managed to return to school immediately after they visited the families, others scheduled time on the following weekday in order to evaluate their efforts and successes in the field.

Here are some student reflections on the service activity performed:

"It is more enjoyable to work practically in the field than in the classroom!"

"We thought that we wouldn't be able carry out the task but after doing it we realized that it is easy and exciting!"

"We have learnt the real meaning of service!"

"We have learnt how to love, respect and help others and serve God!"

"We have learnt how to meet and talk to unknown people!"

Teachers' observations of the students:

"The students felt constant joy and they were united throughout their activities. The cooperation amongst them was easily visible; some of them helped in writing/correcting spellings in the group's plans and observations, others helped in digging, watering, presenting the purpose of their visit to the families, etc."

"The children were aware of the fact that they were serving God throughout this activity."

"Those children who had been reluctant to speak earlier were now beginning to respond to the teacher and their peers during the project's activities. They started to express their feelings and opinions with more clarity and confidence. In fact, they have continued to display this ability even after the project has been completed, and with other subject teachers too."

Volunteering Parents' comments on the students:

"Everyone worked together, it was good! They took ownership of their work!"

"More of such projects are needed for the growth of our children!"

"Even without my help the group did a great job in planting their trees."

"They have done everything as per the rehearsed sequence, it was unbelievable!"

"I never expected such wonderful work from such young children!"

"Considering their age, they have done a good job! I feel the service project is very important for a child's learning."

"I was nice to see that the families warmly welcomed the students."

"I think more activities like this one should be conducted so that students may learn more of such important life skills."

"They shared with the family whatever they had learnt. Not even a single point taught by the expert was missed out!"



Project at a glance

- Total number of student participants: 88
- Total number of groups made: 15
- Total number of teachers involved: 8
- Total number of families visited: 30
- Total number of trees planted: 30
- Total number of parent volunteers: 15

Learning objectives fulfilled through this project

Geography: With the help of Mr. Das, students studied the geographical conditions characterizing their locality which proved conducive for the plantation of litchi trees.

History: Mr. Das explained the historical importance and wide use of the litchi tree in India.

Math: Measurement and ratio concepts were put in use for the mixing of soil with manure and insecticide, fence measurement and amount of water to be provided each day.

Science: Concepts related to plants and their growth requirements (being currently studied in their subject textbooks) were reinforced.

Social skills: Students were required to assume the roles of leaders and team members, both. Also, they were made to work closely with their peers as well as adults.

Spiritual development: As mentioned already, the concepts of cooperation, service to mankind and God, joy from service, etc. were experienced first-hand.

Physical development: Digging the soil, mixing manure/insecticide/soil, watering the saplings, and many more such actions tested the students' fine and gross motor skills.

Communication/language development: A considerably large amount of consultation went into the formation of groups, appointing of leaders and planning. Presentations to parents and the families being visited helped to enhance the confidence and public speaking skills of our students.

Artistic development: Students were encouraged to express their plan and activity through drawing. Their efforts to depict such a complicated subject with the help of only pencil and paper assisted them in developing their ability to visualize and represent their thoughts artistically.

These are only a few examples of some of the areas in which learning was accomplished through our Plantation project.