

## Weaving Environment Education into the Fabric of Teaching

13/08/2010

### Teacher's Workshop -Day 1

The teachers' workshop kicked off with a round of introductions and the participants being welcomed by the ESG team. The workshop was facilitated by Bhargavi Rao, Leo Saldhana and Sruthi Subanna. The participants were from diverse backgrounds; from Maldives to Raigarh to Dahanu to our very own Bangalore. They had such different experiences to share, that it enriched the interaction and the understanding extracted from the workshop.

**Session I**, co-ordinated by Bhargavi, the main organiser of the workshop, started with a



lively discussion on the “Challenges to Environmental Education” and went on to include a critical analysis of our education system itself. While the main faults could be listed as: ineffective modes of learning such as rote learning, ritual learning and information-oriented learning, the conclusion drawn was that the basic construct of our education system is itself flawed. It was recognised that environment education must be all-pervasive, should ideally cut across subject boundaries and should be able to lend itself to discussions under any and every discipline. The use of exams as a means of knowledge-validation was also criticised, so was the reduction of school projects to mere rituals in the pursuit of marks. The participants were invited to ponder ways out of this puzzle, while thinking of means to reduce the burden of learning on school children: is there another way out?



This was followed by a screening of a film called “Gaon chodo ab nahi” that dealt with the tribal’s’ struggle to save their lands and forests. The film brought home to the group the evils of indiscriminate mining and the displacement of indigenous groups in the name of “development”. The undertaking of steps to awaken a social and environmental consciousness among school children, especially in urban areas, was offered as one of the key approaches to the problem of remorseless ecological destruction for access to resources. A sense of responsibility towards the environment cannot be taught, but inspired. Children should be made aware of the environmental implications of unheeding consumerism in this age of

“Conspicuous Consumption”. For such complex issues to be understood and internalised by children it is necessary to instill in them critical thinking; something that our education system fails to do. The most pressing need today is, especially for parents and teachers, a willingness to acknowledge the problems and impart to children the sense of urgency of environmental concerns.

**Session II** was facilitated by Vinay Srinivas of Hasiru Usiru, who spoke to the group on



building political awareness in children. He discussed about the National Curriculum Framework, a government document that effectively prescribes the role of education in a child's life, but which, unfortunately, few schools are aware of and fewer implement. Vinay said that the Preamble of the Indian Constitution is as good a place as any to start a forum of discussion on political awareness with school students. The conversation then turned towards diverse issues like Naxalism, Reservation and the Right to Education Act among others. He stressed on the need to instill a participative attitude among children and recognise themselves as active citizens of the country, thereby educating them to perform their roles in a democracy. Valuable inputs and queries from time-to-time from the participants kept the discussion alive and interesting.

**Session III** brought Deepak Srinivasan from Maraa to talk to the group on theatre and



environmental education; and how learning can be made fun for children. He briefly spoke about plays as an effective medium of transferring knowledge, awareness and information, before diving into a few practical exercises that got the participants' grey cells going and demanded creative outputs- like the “image theatre” exercise that soon became everyone's favourite. Going into the nuances of theatre itself, Deepak advised the group to narrate plays as stories to generate interest in children and eventually bring in environmental themes into the plays; he also asked the group to have faith in kids and their inventiveness and involve them in scripting, designing and directing plays.

A short intermission followed during which another short film was screened called “A Climate Call from the Coast”.

Next, there was a field visit to a place called Thurahalli, on the outskirts of Bangalore, an area of reserved forest. Once there the participants could clearly see the direct impact of



rapid urbanisation on the city's green cover. As such the protected area at Thurahalli is one of the last remaining bastions of greenery in the city; however, it too has not been able to completely escape human encroachment. There, amidst the trees and the grass, was an ideal setting for the group to mull over biodiversity, and the need to conserve it. At the end of the discussions the group dispersed for the day to meet again the following morning.

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### **Teacher's Workshop -Day 2**

**Session IV** – the second day started with a bang, at Lalbagh Botanical Garden where the



group was scheduled to meet Dr. M.B. Krishna, noted ornithologist. Mr. Krishna held a thought-provoking discussion, referring to the environment in economic terms and put across some harsh realities about the way the environment is regarded by most people. He was of the opinion that the education system is highly faulty and how moralizing about the environment will not really achieve environmental awareness/initiatives/protection. He stressed on the absolute necessity of a monetary incentive to safe-guarding the environment and not a moral incentive. He stated with great common sense that appreciation of local ecology cannot happen in a classroom. There is a need to create a connect between the child and environment and teach the child how to assess the environment.

Dr. Krishna went on to give innovative ideas to the group. For example, he said that the profiling of local-ecosystems can be taken up as school projects, and over a period of time schools can create rich databases about their local ecology. This will give the children a good understanding of their environmental and geographical roots that will enable them to live in greater harmony with nature than preceding generations. After that, the group enjoyed a walk around Lalbagh, saw in awe all the ancient trees and enjoyed the flower show.

**Session V-** Sruthi conducted a discussion on terrace-gardening and composting and



related activities for classes to do as school or home projects. Keeping the theme of the workshop in mind she explained how these practical projects can be used to better explain chemical and biological processes such as aerobic and anaerobic decomposition, biodegradation, etc.. She also spoke to the group about natural fertilizers, transplanting samplings and gave various tips on preventing pests from attacking gardens naturally, using ingredients from home.

This was followed by a documentary screening called “Nagara Nyrmalya” based on the importance of segregating solid wastes at source. It showed how the health of not only the sanitary workers but of the entire population is at risk because of the careless way in which people disposed of their household waste.

**Session VI** – post lunch there was a session by Dr. Lakshmi Nilakantan on Maths and



Environment. She spoke to the group about the aesthetic similarities between the two in terms of the beauty and richness. She told the group about the very interesting Fibonacci series and its role in nature. The concept of numbers in nature provides a fascinating field of study.

At the school level Dr Nilakantan suggested various environment-related indoor and outdoor activities that will enhance understanding of mathematical concepts. Problems such as creating a water budget, or a carbon emissions calculation and similar surveys that involve

numbers will present interesting methods of learning math to children while at the same time spreading environmental awareness.

Next was a discussion on the all important matter of career opportunities in Environmental Science and related fields. The facilitators were of the opinion the environment will find applications in a variety of fields as more and more governments are called upon to deal with the environmental issues. The opportunities ranged from working in research institutions, Law, Education to Public Health, Toxicology and Epidemiology studies and also working in environmental lobbies and influencing policy decisions.



The participants were then given DVDs containing documentaries, films, posters and other information on environmental issues and campaigns. At the end there was a feedback session where suggestions and comments were invited from the participants. The co-ordinators also acknowledged the contribution of Mallesh, Rajanna and Sushilamma without whose logistical support this workshop would not have been possible. Finally it was time to take leave. The entire group thoroughly enjoyed the two-day workshop and were going back to their places enriched and ready to share their knowledge.

Report by  
Poornima Pradhyumnan  
Intern at ESG