

Gyanshala's Initiative in the Schools of Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation

(A Review of Strategies, Responses and Classroom Processes)

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Introduction

Gyanshala, a project of the Ahmedabad based Education Support Organisation aims at providing good quality primary education up to class 3 to poor and marginalized urban children living in slums and bastis. Currently it runs over 200 classes in Ahmedabad. The children who complete class 3 under Gyanshala project are admitted to municipal and other schools in class 4 on passing a qualifying test taken by the municipal authority.

In 2006 the municipal authority invited Gyanshala Project to collaborate with it in improving the performance of selected primary schools under its administration. As ESO has set before itself the goal of reforming the mainstream and making it effective in providing good quality education to all children at a mass scale, the organization was keen to use the opportunity offered by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation in this direction.

The chairman of the School Board of AMC met GS persons in some other context and decided to visit the project classes. He was impressed with the confidence and competence shown by the children in the GS classes and felt that he would like to enter into a joint venture with the GS Project Team, which to him seemed hard working, large in size and competent.. It had been observed that children who come to AMC schools after attending GS classes did better than the other children in AMC. This success prompted AMC to seek a partnership with GS. The Deputy Administrator of AMC School Board was also aware of the project and felt that while there is a lot of talk on quality improvement in education in the government circles, it cannot be brought about without some special initiative and change in actual practice. Thus the current environment of universalizing elementary education and improving its quality that was taking over administrative and political consciousness was impelling AMC officials to look for interventions with good chances of success.

Initially this was an offer to train teachers of AMC schools in GS pedagogy and materials. Using the funds available under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan for teacher training could have done this. But GS insisted that unless provision was made to equip the class-rooms with materials that children can use individually, the teachers will have no scope to use the lessons of the training in their daily teaching. Thus on the insistence of Gyanshala, the AMC enlarged the scope of the partnership to include the provision of the teaching learning materials that they have developed in select AMC class-rooms along with the accompanying teacher training and class room support processes. GS made its own funding arrangements to provide the required t-l-ms for the classes being taken for the project.

GS has set before itself the objective of improving the pedagogy and classroom practices in AMC schools through its intervention. It also hopes to use this opportunity to interact with the AMC at a systemic level and find ways of mainstreaming the innovations. It is expected that the initiative would enable GS to enhance its understanding of change in class room interactions. GS would like to see a shift in class – room processes away from rote learning towards more interactive small group work with the teacher and peer learning among children. (Background note on Gyanshala and the AMC initiative; pg. 6) It hopes to carry forward the programme in class 2 and 3 in the AMC schools in the coming years. Later, more AMC schools can also be taken under the project.

From June 2006 to January 2007 GS embarked on the new intervention by securing the required official permissions, sampling and selecting schools, training teachers etc. These efforts have been documented in its reports and notes. It has implemented the project in 46 classes of 23 schools, having 33 teachers and covering 2000 children in class 1.

The essential inputs of the project have been successfully put in place:

- All 46 classes have been supplied with the trunks containing the well-packed and organized t-l-ms.
- The specially designed and made to order racks for keeping the volumes of worksheets for the children have reached all the classes.
- The worksheets, booklets, notebooks have been printed and have reached the classes.
- The teachers have received training for 15 days in two parts.
- Monthly meetings are being held to provide continuous support to teachers.
- A set of four supervisors of GS have been relieved to devote the second part of each day to visiting AMC classes and provide on-site support to teachers. They visit each school twice a week to assist the teachers in using the materials.
- Another senior GS person has been relieved to maintain appropriate liaison with the school administration and the Municipality administration to resolve any emerging bottlenecks.

The Scope of the Review

I was asked by SIG of ICICI to visit the AMC schools under the GS project. The aim of the visit was to understand the Gyanshala strategy of collaborating with AMC; to look at the various processes that have been instituted in the intervention and the response of various stakeholders to these processes; also to observe the classroom processes, the pedagogy and the content of the teaching learning material that was introduced by the project.

I spent five days, from the 16th to the 20th of January, in Ahmedabad. I visited four classes under Gyanshala Project in the bastis and five classes in municipal schools under the GS project. I also met the Chairman of the School Board, its Administrator and Deputy Administrator. I met all members of the GS Core Team and others who develop the materials, supervise fieldwork, document the data related to the project. Extensive discussions and deliberations took place with all these people. The GS team also made presentations of its curriculum in the three areas they focus upon (maths, language and project). The GS team has made a number of relevant papers, reports and other documents available to me.

To begin with, I give below a detailed narration of the municipal school classes that I sat in. This is followed by observations on the pedagogy and classroom practices. Following this, I shall discuss the response of various stakeholders. I shall conclude with observations on the GS strategy in working with the AMC schools.

Municipal Class-rooms under the Gyanshala System

School One

Class 1

A large building inside a boundary walled compound. We cross a long corridor to enter a large sized class- room. Outside the children are finishing with the mid day meal. The classroom has the tell tale Gyanshala rack- black steel with four broad shelves. The Gyanshala worksheets are neatly piled on these shelves. The Gyanshala aluminium trunk rests near a wall. The board on the wall has the date, the attendance written up – and most importantly, also the day of the Gyanshala class. It is day 87 of Gyanshala here. The floor is divided into four squared areas marked out by the durrie strips. These have been laid out in fours in each area. A table and chair for the teacher and plenty of charts etc. on the walls make up the totality of the classroom.

This is one section of class one. Another section is held in the next room. The two teachers who work in these sections come and sit down with us on the mats on the floor. How do they find the new project? It is a marked departure from the method and framework they have used till now. Earlier in teaching language they began with the alphabets and went on to teach words. Now they begin with stories and words and then come down to teaching alphabets. This new method is better, they say because children learn to read, understand and write at the same time. Earlier they would begin writing but were not able to read for long. In teaching mathematics too there is a marked change. Earlier, the children were made to count and write till 50 and then they began teaching operations with numbers. But now, they begin with five numbers at a time and engage with many operations requiring mathematical thinking at the same time.

It is time for the class to begin. The children have poured in and seated themselves in four groups on the mats. Most of them are not in the school uniform. The teacher walks up to the table. She calls out to two children to come and stand beside her. She gives 5 pencils to one child and 4 to another. The total number of pencils are counted together- the number is 9. Then, she gives 4 pencils to the first child and 5 to the second. Every one counts again to reach the same number: 9. The supervisor of Gyanshala is present in the class too. She gets up and joins the teacher. Together they organize more demonstrations of counting with different objects. The two children standing by their side count worksheets: 3 worksheets and 2 worksheets is a total of five worksheets. Three pencils and one pencils is a total of four pencils. Teacher has four pencils and she gives one to Chirag. Who has more pencils? The activity is carried on with chalk pieces. Meanwhile the teacher is trying to locate some material in a bag and then in the trunk. She finds the plastic box she is looking for and brings it to the table. It contains dice. Now dice are used as the material and similar questions are asked. Teacher has 3 dice. Then she got 2 more dice. How many does she have now? By now the children are counting in a lowered voice, the gusto declining. The supervisor has almost taken over the session and is doing most of the activities and the talking. She exhorts the children to perk up – “ I expected you all to be high on energy after your meal!” she chides them. (*The kids were running out of interest and motivation, it seemed to me. They had done the tasks too many times in a row*). The kids perk up and reply in louder voices to the next question she asks of them.

All this would have gone on for about 20 minutes I think. The supervisor then announces that we shall now move on to the *choukadi ka kam* (the work on the books). She takes up the maths worksheet. Opens page 87. Draws some pictures from the page on the board and solves a problem related to them. Then all the children are asked to solve the remaining problems on the page in their own worksheets. The monitors of each of the four groups are asked to get up and get the worksheets for their group from the rack. The other children remain seated in their places. The monitors get the worksheet pile and distribute it to the children in their groups.

Every child opens the worksheet on page 87. They start working on the sums. The teacher and the supervisor go and sit down in one group each. There are 25 children in the class. 10 out of these are older than the rest. Children start leaving their place and walking up to the teacher or the supervisor for clarifications and checking of their work. One child stops another from walking off saying that the teacher will come over here. But soon enough, both of them walk off to see the teacher/ supervisor sitting in the other group. The older children finish the sums faster than the tiny kids. Finally even many of the tiny kids do the sums and bring them over to be checked. One kid is sprawling over his worksheet for the past

10 minutes. A neighboring child attempts to explain the work to him but to no good. The other children who have finished getting their page checked, walk down to the rack and keep back their worksheets in the assigned place. They return to their group and look around for something to do.

A small Gujarati booklet and a copy of the language worksheet given by GS is lying in the middle. They start on it- struggling to read. There must have been something there that they know because they start singing it aloud with enjoyment. The free kids from the next group also wander over to this group and join in the singing, raising the sound level in the class. They are reprimanded mildly by the teacher and the supervisor who ask them to sit back in their respective groups. These two are continuously engaged with some children.

Among the issues in the worksheets the kids require support in is the sum that asks for what is 0 plus 0. This whole page has sums asking for additions of beads strung on two different lines. The last sum has no beads on either of the lines. So, the smaller children, I think, fill the lines up on their own! And they sum it by drawing some shapes in the box given for writing the answer. When I act out the no beads here and no beads there, so no beads in the total idea and a kid agrees that there are no beads in the answer, he anyway writes it as a cross, and not as zero. The teacher is also explaining this issue to another child. Of course some children are fine with the procedure and are showing how to do it to other kids who are lost.

School Two

Class 2.

It is the 85th day of Gyanshala in this class. There are about 25 children in the room. The room has all the GS equipment- the rack with the worksheets, the trunk with the t-l-ms, the pin ups on the walls. The benches and sloping-top desks of the classroom are arranged along three walls marking out four separate spaces. The space in the middle of the room is furnished with durries. The children are seated on the durries as we enter. The teacher is explaining the contents of page 85 of the language worksheet. She is teaching the ooo kee maatraa. It is afternoon and I am told that the story telling and activity sessions were over in the morning hours. The 85th page requires children to write out the first letter of various words printed in it. The teacher shows how this is to be done. She reads out soopadi from the page and asks what is the first letter? Soo say the children. No, you have to write sa, says the teacher. She reads kulhaadi. Children call out ku. No you should write ka says the teacher. The GS person accompanying me, interrupts and points out to the teacher that it is fine to write soo and ku. She agrees as readily and instructs the children likewise.

She keeps down the language worksheet and picks up the maths volume. Opens page 85. She asks children to recap what they know about ascending and descending order of numbers. They let out something of a rhyme on this- or some definition, which they speak out loud in a singsong way. She takes an example from the page and shows to children how to do the exercises there.

She keeps down the maths worksheet and picks up the volume on project work. Opens page 85. It requires children to observe the pattern in a sequence of pictures drawn in different lines and extend the pattern. She does one exercise on the board. Then she asks one child to get up and fetch a pile of worksheets at a time. First the Gujarati worksheets are brought over. She calls out the name of every child and hands over the volume in the child's hand She looks over to us and explains that the volumes get very disorganized and so she is distributing them herself. Having finished with the Gujarati worksheet distribution, she carries on to handing out the maths and project worksheets to the children. The distribution over, children are asked to go over to their benches and start working on the sheets. They scamper back to the desks and start off their work.

Teacher moves around the groups for sometime, helping and explaining. Then she sits on the bench in one group. Children run up to her from the other groups too and crowd around.

The smaller children are a bit lost but struggling to make their way. They are looking for support at each step. The pattern exercise is out of reach of the tiny ones. Instead of drawing the picture that should come next, they draw the pictures per se. Some pictures such as that of the star, the butterfly are very challenging for the tiny ones. I wonder if sufficient work has been done to arrange things in a pattern with concrete objects?

As kids finish the worksheets, they put it back on the rack. Some have sat down on the durrie and are writing the alphabets on a standard slate meant for this exercise.

Class 3.

We sat in for a few minutes in the next class of this same school. Again, we see the by now familiar setting. About 25 children, working in groups on their benches arranged around the classroom. The teacher sitting on with one group, but children from all the other groups walking up to her as and when they finished their work or did not know how to proceed. They are doing the maths worksheet related to larger than-smaller than signs. The sheet has lines with balls of different numbers strung on each and the children have to write the numbers and put the comparative sign of greater than, smaller than. However, the balls are also of different sizes, even as they are strung up in different numbers. This means the kids have to keep two variables in mind while negotiating the task- and the third dimension is that of grasping the sign to be put in. I thought the kids were too small for such complex exercises, certainly those who are just around age six or less, with this being their first year in school.

Class 4.

Again, the familiar setting-around 25 children working in groups, doing their language worksheet. They showed their work to the teacher and then went up to the rack to keep the volume in the assigned place. They were able to recognize the words they had been taught in the previous worksheets- haathee, paaghadee, sasaloo, bus, gaay etc. as the teacher wrote these on the board.

There is a palpable concern about low attendance in the mind of the GS person accompanying me. He checks up on reasons for absence and exhorts children to come every day.

School Three

Class 5.

Teacher goes into the class at 11.30 with just 15 children. She invites the kids to sing a song or tell a story. They take turns at it and for the next 20 minutes or so the class is alive with pleasant spirits. One little kid comes up and stands in front of every one to give a solo narration of the story- the mouse with the seven tails. He holds forth for almost five minutes. Throughout this vibrant, gay morning hour the other children and their parents stream in to join the class. Soon there are 27 children, 10 girls and 17 boys. The teacher takes the attendance, writes it up on the board with the date and day and year and discusses this with the class.

She writes one word after another on the board. The words learnt till now- haathee, paaghadee, sasaloo, bus, gaay, madhmaakhee, jungle, aakaash, kairee, nishaan, fuggo, pahaad. She is calling out a child at a time and asking the word to be 'read.'. Then she writes out a simple new word- karam. The kids struggle

with it- sounding out each syllable separately. She gets them to say it together. Now, she asks them to remind her of the words that have got left out (from the corpus of words they have worked on in the class). The children call out- driver, ticket, jhaadh. She writes on as they call out. Then asks them to recognize random words from the board one at a time. Some kids cannot recognise the words. She teaches those words on the board again. Such as, aakaash. She refers to the story of the kite that flew off to the sky as she teaches how the word is written to the class.

She rubs off the words from the board. Writes da. What is this? Kids say da. She writes dada. What is this?

Kids – dada.

She goes on to practise ka? kaka? raja? Some say jungle to raja, obviously taking the cue from ja. They go on to mama, pen, kem, netar, kesar, dev. To dev, some say dada, again the cue from da. Or, is it dava? They try an alternative. Teacher points to the ey kee neeshanee on da and remarks that she had not added the aa kee neeshaanee to da so how can it be daadaa? She teaches the ey kee neeshaanee and explains dev.

The teacher goes on to recapitulate the O kee neeshaanee, asking children if they remember that she taught them ko? They agree to it and answer her next query- what is this- mor? Mor, they speak out together. To mo she now adds sam and makes mosam. She asks the kids to read it out. Next, the kids are instructed to write the words in their note-books. She keeps a box of pencils in the center of the room. Some kids jump their desks to collect pencils and go back. One kid takes a sharpener and goes to the dustbin in the corner of the room to sharpen his pencil. Many children take out a small booklet containing words of different maatraas and start writing out from there. On the walls are pasted some A-3 size sheets with the same words printed in large font besides pictures of the images they referred to- gaay, sasalu, madhmakhi, keru, haathee, paaghadee.

It is 12. 15 and new kids are still coming in to join the class! She takes attendance of the children who have come in the past hour. Now there are 39 children! They come in and try to start off on the task that is ongoing. As they finish the kids walk up to the teacher to show her their work. At 12.30, she winds up this recap session and plays on her rattle. She gets them to do some physical exercises- hands up, down, on your shoulders, on your head etc. She gently reprimands children for coming in late. Then instructs them on how to proceed for the mid day meal. The class empties. The kids carry their plates in their school bags and take it out for the meal.

They are back in about 15 minutes. This school organizes the cooking of the meal for several neighbouring schools. Thus the meal is ready on time and gets done in a few minutes. As they come in, they bring their worksheets to show to me. The project work worksheet gives space to draw pictures on various themes; a page is left blank for drawing a cricket game, one for drawing a kitchen and so on. The pictures are beautiful and exquisite, showing the unassuming bravery children are capable of. I would, and so would most teachers, and other adults, be quite nonplussed at how to draw a kitchen or a cricket ground!

Teacher resumes the class by playing her rattle and repeating some more of the hands up- down regimen. She offers to tell them all a story of a lion and a mouse. Taking the center of the room, she enacts the story with great love and emotion, engaging and addressing the class very endearingly. A few questions on the story follow. She is simultaneously collecting the pencils taken from the box by the kids and replacing them in the box, which she keeps away.

Then a bit abruptly, she is on the board, and writes keyree. She introduces ree. They speak out- ree. Then she write see. They speak out see. One kid mutters softly- a,b,c (see?) ,d,e,f,g,. She goes on to mee. Then starts writing nishan, which the kids speak out even before she has finished writing it (this belongs to the corpus of recognized words). She writes the two maatraas- i and ee and discusses these. Writes mee. (I can see that some kids are losing interest – and engaged in trading of things, followed by fighting)

She writes pa and asks what is this? They say- patang nu pa. She corrects them- don't say patang nu pa, say pa. (the distraction has spread to a few more benches by now and she has to call out frequently to discipline the class and demand their attention). She introduces pee, then nee. She says, ' koi koi moolakshara nee aagad i hoi to ni, ee hoi to nee.'

The teaching done, she asks them to speak out words that contain the sound ree. She calls out to different children to speak out a word each. They say:

baaree, reetu, reema, kareena, reeng (cooker nee reeng, cycle nee reeng), reemot, t.v, riksha, raveena. She is writing these words as they are spoken out. Then she calls a child at a time to underline ree in the words written out. She clarifies about riksha – ismein ree chhey? No teacher, yell the kids. Some words are written too high on the board and she offers to underline the ree in those. But the older children jump up to do the task.

The teacher goes on to words with si and see. She resorts to her rattle and raise hand regimen for a split second to refocus attention. The words with si and see come in-

ceevil, (civil), C.I.D, seema, maasee And singh, silpa, khul ja sim sim, shiva. Teacher calls the kids to come and underline the see in the words she has written out on the board.

She goes onto introducing ki and kee. They supply the words with ki and kee as follows:

tikit, kisan, krish And veekee, keekee, keedee.

She uses her focus- funda again and goes on to pi and pee. The words come in : priyanka, pinal, pink colour (ya to angrezi mein chhey!). pita And, peepoodee, peepalo, peen, and paanee peeyu chhoo mein pee aave chhey, they say. Someone says paper and she talks about it- paper mein pey aavechhe; then some one says paapaa (ismein to paa aave chhe. Worksheet mein papa nu soo kahvaaye? Pitaa. Ismein pi aave chhe).

She proceeds to ni and nee. The words offered by the children are: nishaan, anil, nirma, neema, maneesh, neel, neesh.

She shows a hell- bent sincerity in completing the task, trying desperately to remain friendly, engaged, patient, excited. A truly heroic performance. There is so much that is distracting in the class- the trading and infighting is spreading, some old kids are forever hanging on to the window from the outside and peeping in, another tiny tot is constantly coming up to the door of the class room and one of the students is walking up to her to give or take something and shove her out every now and then. She has not lost her cool even once. It is 2 P.M. She has been teaching ee and e for 45 minutes. Now she winds up this session. Spreads a durrie in the center of the room. Calls over pahala group children to sit on the durrie. 10 children come and sit on the durrie. She has kept 10 plastic boxes containing beads and cards ready at hand. She hands out the boxes, one to each child. She gets up and goes over to the board and writes out a few words. These are words without maatraas and with aa kee maatraa. Param, kanak, anaaj, aaraam,kaaraj, samaaj, jaanam, saras,naman, ramat, majaa, havaa, karaa, raam. The rest of the 30 children in the class have to write out these words in their notebooks.

She returns to the group of ten kids on the durrie. She instructs them- throw a dice, read the number that comes on top, take the number card showing that number from the box and keep it down on the durrie . When three children have done this- they have to arrange the three number cards in the descending order. She is hurrying them up- and conducting the work in a tense, goading style. This does not seem very encouraging for reflection and thinking on the part of the children. At 2.10 P.M she winds up the work and asks them to go back to the benches and write out the words from the board.

The third group is called out on the durrie. She puts away the dice boxes, and brings forth another set of 10 boxes containing cards with pictures and syllables. She makes the kids close their eyes and pick up a picture card. Some other kids have to pick up the syllable cards. Then, they open their eyes and recognize the syllable and speak out the word related to the picture on their card. Then they have to find their pair-

the picture has to pair with the syllable that comes first in speaking the name of the picture. She is conducting the group activity in a desperate kind of tense hurry. All this while, the 30 children sitting on their benches writing the words, are calling out to her loudly ‘ Hey Teacher’ “ Hey Teacher’ Some are coming up to her to show their work and she is ignoring them as best as she could.

We leave the class at this juncture. Later, I learn that the time allotted for group activity in the Gyanshala plan is 10 minutes per group. She has to finish with 4 groups in 40 minutes. What we observed in the above class was the first half of work planned under the GS project. The second half consists of working on the worksheets for each of the three subjects. We have observed this part of the work in the other classes.

Pedagogic Features and Concerns

The main features of the classroom pedagogy I observed therefore are as follows:

Discourse Around Concrete Experiences: Children get opportunities to use concrete materials and do some activities in class; materials are available, organized; teachers are prepared to use them with children. This seems best done through demonstration involving a few children, watched by the rest of the class.

Shortage of Time: When each child gets the opportunity to do activities with concrete materials, there is insufficient time and the teacher hurries them through the task like a ritual. Children need to play around with things a bit. This scope exists in original GS class design, when each group of children gets 15 minutes of free time to play and read as they want. But even there, I am not sure if the materials used in the small-group teaching is left free for use of children later on. I think it is packed up and kept away.

Options: Various possibilities can be tested for the best way of organising the concrete work for individual children. Teacher can demonstrate an activity for the whole class and then divide the class into 10 groups of 4 children each. The 10 sets of boxes of t-l-ms can be used for the ten groups of four children each. Having watched the demonstration for 10 minutes, all the children can have 30 minutes to play in their groups. This way they can spend more time with concrete materials. At present, they have to go on writing words from the board while the teacher sits with group after group of children to conduct the ten- minute session of activity.

Other variations like the competition between two groups in the class on doing a certain task right is also effective in focusing and making an activity meaningful in the true sense. For example, I watched two groups compete for answering questions on a map of Ahmedabad district in a GS class. Such activities give enough time for every one to figure out the task- they see it happen several times.

The same effect is achieved when the teacher calls a few children to demonstrate an activity for the whole class. However, a similar effect is lost when the material is given to a child for a few minutes and taken away- the teacher tense about getting ten children to perform the chore in ten minutes total. Thus various suitable strategies can be put in place with the characteristic design-detail that GS is capable of achieving. I am only pointing to the need to improve the effectiveness of concrete activities with children in small groups.

From Teaching-Down to Working Along with Children: Teachers found it difficult to shift from the established norm of whole class teaching and organize group work with the children. GS team supported them by demonstrating the logistics of doing this in the monthly meetings. GS supervisors have also demonstrated group work to teachers in their visits to the classrooms. As a result teachers have begun to conduct group work. Teachers had also been taken to GS classes where they observed GS teachers conduct group work in the much smaller rooms they function in. From complete

resistance in the beginning, the teachers are now coming around to start attempting group work with children every day. It is a step in the right direction.

The teachers are not yet ready to follow the GS system of group rotation throughout the day. Still, they try to engage with individual children and support them. There is a marked shift from the authoritarian paradigm of the teacher instructing the class as a whole. The teachers try to sit down with the children, explain issues to them separately and look at their work individually. This alone can prove to be a big input in achieving greater learning. But in the absence of an organized rotation of groups, it does not work out smoothly at all. The teachers themselves complain of the unmanageable situation that is created in the class by the expectation that children should show their work and discuss it with the teacher after they have done it every day. (Refer to reports of teachers' monthly meeting.) The teachers have to over time realize that this expectation can be fulfilled best only by allotting separate time for the groups.

Follow-Up through Worksheets: Introduction to a concept is followed by organized well-designed written work on it done individually by children. The worksheets are well made and supplied to each child. These are kept in an organized manner in the classroom. Great care is taken to ensure that the work sheet designated for a day is completed that day. This enables teachers to conduct follow up of teaching in an efficient manner. No time is spent on writing out questions on the board, copying it from the board or the text book in the copies, (as is the norm in normal class rooms) or getting diverted into some other task, leaving the teaching- follow-up hanging in mid air. Children also enjoy working on the work-sheets. They are interesting, purposeful, almost within their reach in most cases, with adequate challenge. And, above all, they have to solve it on their own. These are not answers to questions that teachers dictate to them and they have to learn it by rote by endless repetition. They have to put their minds to it. The fact that children succeed in working on the exercises in the worksheets itself raises the enthusiasm and motivation of the teachers.

Prior Preparation for the Class: Some teachers certainly showed the ability to put in extra work and keep the t-l-ms organized for the work to be done. Field notes of the GS supervisors indicate that many teachers do go through the teachers' guide either a day before or come early to school to do so and prepare for the class transaction.

Contextualized Learning Processes: The older frameworks of teaching language and mathematics have been modified to accommodate the new approaches embodied in the GS programme. These focus on greater contextualised learning (introducing words and syllables through stories and poems, drawing what one sees around etc.) and acquiring a sense of numbers by manipulating objects in different contexts. The methodology integrates structured decoding work alongside the contextual work (as for example in the teaching of the ee kee neeshaanee, ey kee neeshanee etc.). After the initial resistance and skepticism shown by teachers, GS has built a degree of conviction and even appreciation in them in favour of this shift in approach. (Reports of teachers' meetings bear this process out too). However, it seems to me that when a story is told and enacted, or a poem is done in the class, children do not have a copy of it in front of them and do not get to run their fingers on the text. Even the teacher does not show the reading process by running the finger on a poster or pin up. I am not sure if this is possible when the teacher reads out the library-books in the small groups in the GS classes.

Display of Children's Creative Work: Display of children's pictures and stories as told to teachers or written by those who can write is not factored in. This can be organized through the creation of wall- papers by each group of children every week. These things will enhance the contexts for reading and writing further and balance the weight falling on structured decoding work. Such free writing and reading work will give more contexts to engage with various syllables and the way they are to be written.

The teachers must reach a state when they can relax with the children, explore and enjoy with them. They must invite the child to open up and share his/her world and ideas and go on to sharing and talking of things that the child wants to bring up. GS pedagogy has to assimilate an element of flexibility and spontaneity. At present the needs of punctuality, time keeping and accountability to schedule overwhelm the practices of the teachers and the GS staff both.

Implications of irregular attendance and age difference: Irregular attendance by children is a reality that needs to be factored in a curriculum design that is seeking to remove obstacles in the endeavours of poor urban children. GS seeks to do this by ensuring adequate spiraling, repetition and slow pacing of conceptual teaching in its materials. It also seeks to ensure personalized support to each child by the teacher every day and additional support by supervisors every week. While I could see that the basic inputs were more or less in place in the design, a detailed observation is required to study if these reach the irregular children and address their needs appropriately. Some of the content seemed confusing, complex and difficult for the smaller children in class one in particular. This aspect requires better feedback to the material development team.

There are indications that with the school and teacher showing more seriousness and effectiveness in engaging with the learners, parents are beginning to refrain from taking away children from the class before the end of the day. This aspect must be highlighted and used to make schools more committed.

Processes and Responses

I have looked at the reports of monthly meetings, notes of the field supervisors and follow up visits of the core team members. The project has shown great seriousness and rigour in implementing the intervention in partnership with the government. As mentioned above, the core team should spend more time in class room observation to get detailed and in-depth feedback on the materials used. I have not looked at the manner in which such feedback is recorded and used at present- though, the presentations made by the core team referred to instances when material was modified on the basis of learning from the classroom.

The political and administrative persons concerned with the intervention are keen and committed to make it succeed and extend and expand it at the earliest. A comparative assessment between the performance of children under AMC-GS project and those not under it is their chief demand. They also press for strong liaison with the commissioner, the secretary of education and the minister to build timely support and backing for the project. The deputy administrator is also ensuring that the format of learner assessment that has been issued by the GCERT to all schools is adhered to in the AMC schools linked to GS and that the children of the project should fare well on the assessment parameters of the GCERT. GS has already taken care to work out the linkage with the continuous assessment format of GCERT and its curricular goals and worksheets.

However, the amenable working conditions of the original GS project cannot be replicated under AMC, such as regular classes on all days, full teaching time with no other distractions on the part of the teacher. If the AMC intervention shows poorer results than the original GS results, the administrator fears a backlash from the teachers who might be held responsible for inadequate performance. GS has assured AMC that as a matter of policy it does not blame teachers but looks at ways to solve problems in the system and the package as a whole.

The problem of drop out children is discussed with a lot of concern. AMC is pressing GS to take on additional initiatives to show some breakthrough on this count. GS is negotiating these pressures and pressing for holistic school reform as the only long- term solution to the problem of drop out children. This problem exists even in the original GS classes and thus has many dimensions that are not fully understood yet. The Administrator has suggested that an action research be undertaken on this issue.

The Administrator was of the opinion that a pilot project has meaning only if it is scaled up and promised to find all possible ways to scale up the GS intervention in AMC schools, including allocating some funds to pay for the supply of teaching learning materials.

The teachers in the schools have begun to overcome their resistance to the changes and offer co-operation to the best of their abilities. The field staff of GS was very apprehensive and disappointed with the non – functionality of the schools in the beginning but has begun to look at things more positively as teachers slowly showed a good response.

For eg. let us look at the supervisor’s notes on the teacher Fatma Ben of Jamalpur School:

‘I began follow up in this class in the last days of August. Fatma Ben found it a little difficult to use the stories and teach the class. She would always complain that the children do not write; things take too long to move. But now this teacher performs really very well. The children sit in groups. Activities take place. In the beginning the teacher was clueless and felt helpless in working with the children. I myself took the class and conducted the story telling, the subject teaching, the group activity etc. in her presence. Then she got a hang of how to go about it all. Now the class transaction has reached a certain level. When the children face any difficulty the teacher tries to support and help them. All her complaints against the children are now gone. In fact now she is comfortable with me and takes my help in clarifying her doubts and has begun to use the learning materials quite well.’

Issues related to the GS strategy with AMC

A Supplement or a Replacement to Government Curriculum: In principle, AMC has invited GS to provide supplementary materials to enhance class- room processes. The curriculum and text- books prescribed by the GCERT remain untouched. The GS materials can play the role of supplementation because they also subscribe to the NCF 2000 and seek to prepare children to successfully integrate with the Gujarat government curriculum from class 3. As such no variance or contradiction is expected in the ultimate outcome of the GS intervention with the educational expectations of the Gujarat state curriculum.

In practice it seems to be an attempt to enable a larger number of children to reach the common expected outcomes in learning through a different and better pedagogy; whereas the state programme fails to do so. GS has taken a benchmark test of children in class 2 in September 2006. These children of AMC have not been under the GS programme. The results of this test will be compared to the results of the children under GS initiative when they reach the same point of time in class 2 in September 2007.

The GS project has sought a commitment of 3 hours teaching time per day from the administration. The understanding is that the remaining time can be devoted to the state curriculum work. In practice too, planning and materials are given to cover duration of 3 hours. Thus in principle the GS project functions as a supplementary project. However, the situation in practice is that actual teaching learning never takes place for even three hours per day. Thus GS tries to remove obstacles to ensure that its supplementary package of three hours work per day is implemented in reality in the schools. This then inadvertently becomes the total curriculum transaction that is taking place in these classes. Thus, due to the management of the school- time in general, a supplementary programme of learning is inadvertently the entire programme of learning for the children of class 1 in the AMC schools where GS project is implemented.

At the level of class one and two the distinction between state curriculum and supplementary curriculum is not tenable either. The goals of reading writing, comprehension, basic numeracy and engagement with the world around are universally acceptable as goals for this stage. The difference lies in details of examples, stories, topics etc. or basic method used for reaching the goals. In a sense GS intervention in AMC schools is an intervention for curriculum reform. GS is strategically trying to build its relationship with the government and ensure that it acquires the legitimacy to intervene in AMC schools. Thus care is

taken to avoid conflicts with SSA programmes, avoid variance with format for continuous assessment of children as mandated by the government, avoid immediate dramatic changes in classroom management and practices that teachers are accustomed to. The energy devoted to give onsite support to AMC teachers to change classroom processes overtime is noteworthy.

Curriculum Reform or Systemic Reform: GS posits that the introduction of new t-l-ms and accompanying teacher support system is the main strategy it is following in AMC. However, a concern for systemic reforms is evident in GS's interaction with the administration. It is insisting on regularity of GS classes, keeping tabs on teacher absenteeism, and trying to ensure that replacements are organized for teachers who are on leave. It is trying to ensure that the Principals do not take teachers away from classes for at least three hours. It is trying to ensure that trained teachers are not transferred out from the school. In another vein, it is posited that the strategy revolves around providing materials in the hands of the children. They can organize their own learning if suitable materials are provided and given in their hands. If teacher support and attention is also provided, it can come as a bonus, the more the better. Thus ensuring provision of materials and teachers in the classroom is the driving force of the intervention.

Leveraging From An Independent Base: A strategic lever GS has is the existence of its own project in the bastis of Ahmedabad. It is able to show how it can ensure regular teaching in the classes. It is able to show how it can organize group work and personalized support to each child with facilities that are much less than those afforded by AMC. It is able to show how information about various aspects of curriculum and class management are collected, kept and used for improving efficiency of the programme. And it is able to show that GS can manage all this at a fairly macro scale of over 200 classes. Thus at both curricular and systemic planes, GS is in a position to press for desired changes. However, whether a further expansion of GS classes will contribute to its leveraging potential is not a very convincing proposition.

In Conclusion

AMC is a public sector facility for children that cannot ever be replaced by a private or NGO enterprise. Thus ideally GS should use its project to fight for sectoral reform such that AMC like facilities provide meaningful education to all, especially the poor. GS facilities compare badly with those of AMC in terms of space and infrastructure. GS classes are run in small rooms inside people's homes. There is no advantage of keeping children in such cramped spaces for three hours for three years, while the larger, better furnished, lit and ventilated spaces of the government schools lie under utilized. GS also has to negotiate suitable processes to get its children evaluated by AMC administration and certified fit to join class 4 in government schools. (Annual Report, 2002-03, pg. 19). It has to try hard to convince parents and others in the community to give value to the high quality educational inputs GS seeks to provide in what to parents does not seem like a school (Annual Report, 2002-03, pg. 14).

The case GS is making in favour of its feeder strategy is that it can provide good quality education at RS. 1500 per child whereas the government spends RS. 5000 per child and even then fails to deliver results. GS also points out that a larger proportion of its fund is spent for children and not on salaries of teachers. While these facts substantiate a case for a good social welfare programme that provides good value for money spent by donors, it does not address the larger issues of mass education in the country. Undoubtedly the government must increase its spending on t-l-ms and trainings. But, a properly paid and professionalised teacher cadre and a well maintained school infrastructure is not a dispensable factor in the mass-education enterprise.

GS seems to suggest, for example that ten GS like units may be set up in Ahmedabad to provide strong educational grounding to children in slums and having prepared them well, can feed them into the regular municipal schools at class 4 level. However this is only one of the possibilities of partnership between the public and the 'private' agencies (and it is fraught with limitations as discussed above). If GS can

demonstrate success in its present initiative with AMC, other possibilities will also gain credence. For example, GS can show how school management can be modified to improve learning processes. Its understanding of the 'total system solution' approach (Annual Report, 2002-03, pg.3) is crucial. GS may think of providing greater supervisory support and also the back up of some extra teachers to tone up the functioning of the municipal schools – as an interim measure put in place till administration is made to see the need for such investments and provide for them.

GS can work along with the administration to find 'out of the box' solutions for bottlenecks such as teacher absenteeism. In a discussion with the chairperson of the AMC School Board, a very novel suggestion was being explored. The idea was to harness the trainees of teacher training colleges to go to the schools where teachers were on leave for their practice teaching. Instead of more GS-like classes we need more AMC classes under GS-like projects. GS can in fact additionally organize help in escorting children to the AMC schools, which may be at a distance and involve crossing the road etc. GS may also provide support to learning by way of library and activity centers in the bastis.

However, it appears that GS is (understandably) wary and unsure of the prospects of the AMC initiative. Given the increased interest in education in political circles, this is a juncture when civil society organizations like ESO can concentrate on extracting the maximum results that are possible in the public sector. There will always be time to try out the AMUL like strategy combined with competitive market dynamics among various CSOs vying to get contracts to deliver good primary level education(Annual Report, 2002-03, pg. 5). GS should, in the next few years, use all its advantages derived from the existing 200 scale operation to revamp the total system of the AMC schools as much as possible.

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