

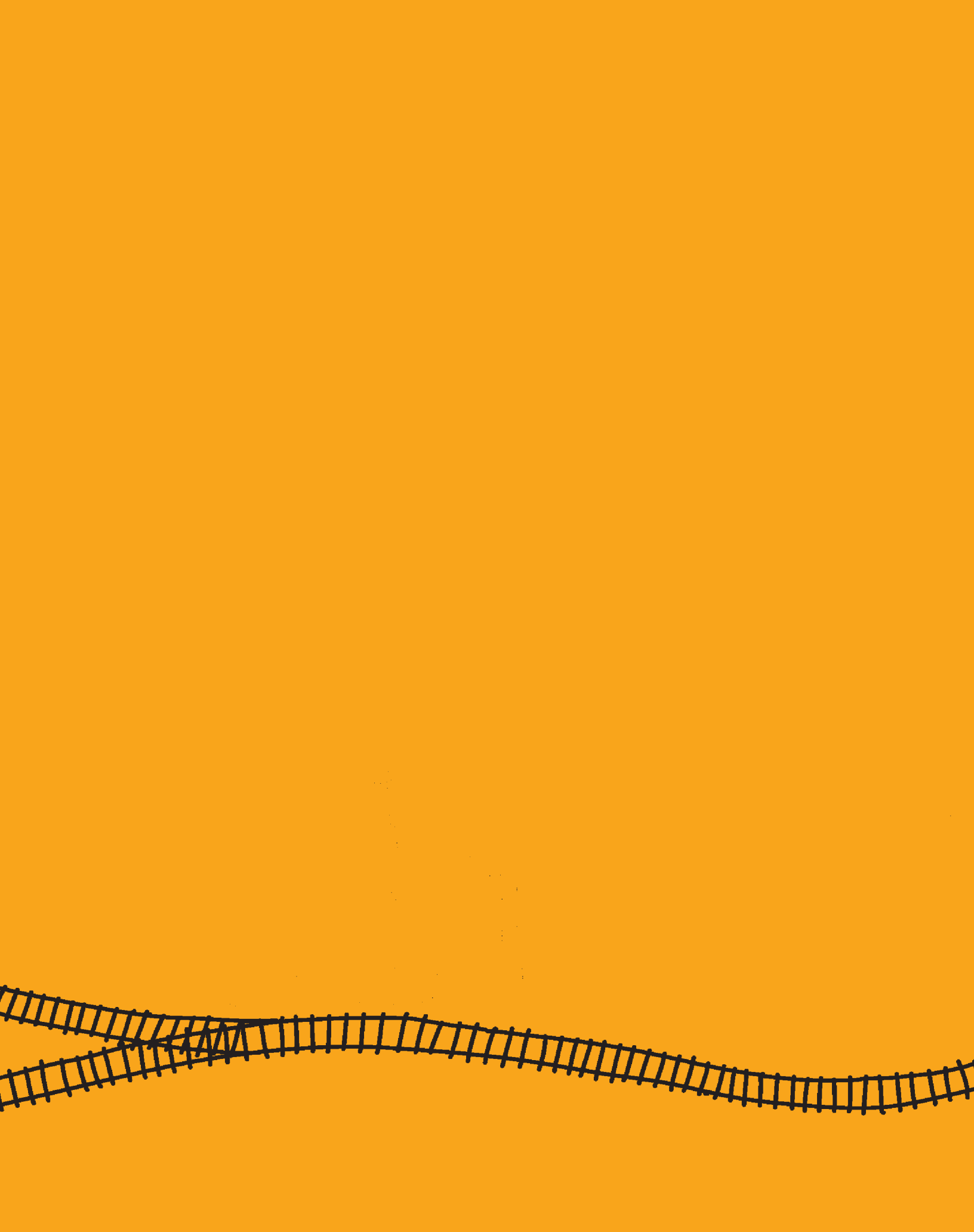
Towards  
Joyful  
Learning

**Khelghar Handbook**

**1**



**Khelghar | Palakneeti Pariwar Publication**







Towards  
Joyful  
Learning







## **Khelghar Handbook - 1**



**Palakneeti  
Pariwar  
Publication**



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**YouTube channel**

**[youtube.com/khelghar](https://www.youtube.com/khelghar)**

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# Preface

**Greetings to all the friends who are passionate about children and their education.**

In 1996 we started with a dream. A dream of providing joyful education and development to the deprived children! By combining this dream with study we embarked on Khelghar activities in Laxminagar, a slum in Pune to complement what these children learned at school. Children from deprived communities should also have a happy childhood; they should be able to express themselves freely; they should try their best to find answers to their own questions ... We are committed to see this happen.

Palakneeti magazine has been exploring both the academic and social aspects of parenting since 1987. This made it easy to determine how Khelghar activities should be conducted based on the work of Palakneeti magazine. Khelghar work is not just an emotional response to the concern for the deprived sections of the society. It embodies the essential social parenting role every competent person should perform to 'overcome deprivation in the world around us'. 'Parenting is not about control; it is about compassionate help, about eliminating the obstacles created by the circumstances so as to give the child a space to learn!' This parenting policy is firmly rooted in Khelghar Tais and Dadas and that is the reason why this work could spread throughout Maharashtra.

Khelghar was well received by society from the very beginning. Today a group of twenty competent Tais, Dadas and volunteers are involved in this work. Khelghar makes efforts to lay the foundation of language and mathematics along with the learning of life skills. As a result of these efforts children start enjoying learning. Seeing

them live with a cheerful confidence further enhances our strength and our belief that 'change is possible'

In order to reach out to more and more children from deprived communities in Maharashtra, Khelghar training workshops are conducted by the Palakneeti Parivar since 2007. These workshops receive spontaneous participation from parents and teachers every year. As a result of these efforts new Khelghars have been opened at ten places in Maharashtra. The book 'Learning Joyfully' is an attempt to make available the experience of many years of the Khelghar team as well as the things learnt in the workshop in a systematic and written form at one place. It is also an attempt to give strength and direction to the endeavours of Tais and Dadas.

Except for a few noteworthy experimental schools most of the other children are still deprived of joyful, creative learning even today. The child-centered, meaningful methods in this book will be equally useful to teachers and parents of such children. In fact, this book can be useful to anyone who thinks sensitively about the teaching-learning process.

The book 'Learning Joyfully' is divided into two volumes for the convenience of the reader. In this book we have tried to combine all the four components—the basic principles of education, the strength of life skill development, activity based and life-oriented teaching of school subjects and guidance for teacher activists.

Volume I / Part I starts with the chapter 'About Khelghar' which explains the concept of Khelghar. 'How do we learn?' and how this teaching learning process will be joyfull are discussed. The use of

play, art and dialogue to provide impetus to the development of consciousness and thinking are assessed. Part two is about the teaching of life skills. It has a detailed discussion of activities such as Discussion Forum, 'Saturday Khelghar', etc. This part, in addition to the information regarding activities also seeks to add a positive perspective. In Volume I of 'Learning Joyfully', we are providing a basket full of varied perspectives, activities and possible solutions to the problems that usually arise so that we can develop children's abilities and life skills.

Volume II explains how concepts in language and mathematics can be taught by linking them to children's lives. The chapter on evaluation considers the learning process, assessment of what is achieved, deciding the further direction and thus completes the learning-teaching cycle.

This book will help the reader to understand the basic concepts of the teaching-learning process. It will introduce new ideas and activities that will be useful when working with children. The book focuses on a number of key areas where there can be confusion or problems and provides positive suggestions regarding what exactly can be done on such occasions. Palakneeti Khelghar experiences are also narrated to help the readers. One reading of the book will help one get easily to the exact part needed for consultation at any time later.

It is important that children get information and knowledge through education. However, to see a positive change in the attitude of the children it is very essential that a similar change takes place in the teachers first. For this the teacher must do some candid introspection of her attitude and perspective. The book discusses how teachers can do this to bring about positive changes in themselves.

Teaching children and also learning during the course of time is a dynamic and lively process. Every child is different. Different children have different needs. How to reach them, how to make them think has to be decided by each teacher according to the particular situation. We believe that this book will help you choose the right method for the right situation.

The efforts of many volunteers and teachers have helped shape the work of Khelghar since 1996. They consistently explored novel activities with the children and could creatively come out with different educational tools. They participated in studies and brainstorming discussions essential for this process. All of them have directly or indirectly contributed in the making of this book.

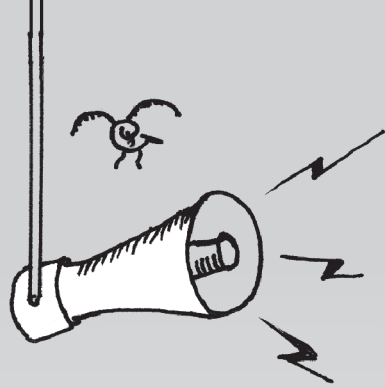
Shubhada Joshi worked for many years in the editorial team of Palakneeti magazine. Her experience was very useful in the writing of this book. The five-year long writing process wouldn't have been complete without the strong support of friends from Palakneeti family. The confidence that this companionship and strong support will make the difficult task of writing such a comprehensive book possible was proved right.

Khelghar work received support from the Tata Trusts since 2004. Apart from providing financial support the trust also provided continuous guidance to ensure that the work gets done systematically, thoroughly and with proper assessment. Showing faith in us, Tata Trusts also endorsed the idea of publishing this book. That is why we were able to complete this work. We are deeply indebted to the trust and to the Coordinator of the Trust, Mrs. Amruta Patwardhan.

In 2021 we were asked by Wipro Foundation to provide training based on this book for Hindi and English speaking activists. The Foundation also provided financial support for translating the book into Hindi and English to serve as a reference material during the training. We are deeply indebted to the Wipro Foundation as this book will take the concept of Khelghar to all parts of India. It is a source of huge satisfaction for us.

Friends, we have tried to lay out a concrete path towards learning with joy. You will feel we are with you in your journey in the form of this book. This book should not be a one way communication. The exchange of ideas that takes place will definitely enrich both sides. That is why your feedback is very valuable to all of us.

May your work with children commence and prosper. Heartfelt wishes to all of you on this path of enjoying learning and helping to learn with joy!



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People who work with children are often referred to as teachers, activists, or facilitators. In schools, teachers are called Bai, Madam and Sir. In Khelghar the teacher interacts with the children in various roles such as a guide, a motivator, and a friend. Hence, Khelghar activists working at basti level are commonly referred to as Tais and Dadas. Instead of using 'Tai-Dada' each time, for convenience they are referred to simply as 'Tai' in this book.



# Acknowledgement

No work is Causa sui and self-contained. New works are built on the basis of the facts and methods that have been learned from numerous earlier studies, research and experiments.

Thanks to Palakneeti Pariwar Sanstha's 'Palakneeti' Magazine, a wealth of ideas and experiments from all around the world was available. We got information and moreover, inspiration from many organizations working for innovative education in Maharashtra such as Aksharnandan, Navnirmiti, Srujan Anand Vidyalaya, Pragat Shikshan Sanstha, Anandniketan School Wardha, Quest, Homi Bhabha Science Centre, Gram Mangal. Educational materials prepared by these organisations as well as that provided by Madhuri Purandare, Varsha Sahastrabuddhe, Late Lilatai Patil, Dr. Mohan Deshpande, Ramesh Panse, Nilesh Nimkar were also helpful.

We learned a lot from the work of many organisations outside Maharashtra too, such as, Eklavya and Muskan (Mdhya Pradesh), Sita School(Karnataka), Tulir and Puvidham(Tamil Nadu), Digantar (Rajastan), Thoughtshop Foundation(West Bengal) and many more. The information we received from many individuals and organizations in conjunction with our experience shaped the Khelghar methods.

On this journey of bridging the gap between experiencing, speaking and finally writing, Varsha Sahastrabuddhe who has a very good understanding of language and education guided us a lot. Every interaction with her was very instructive. She read our writing carefully, checked it out and suggested corrections.

Ramakant Dhanokar, Trustee of Palakaneeti Pariwar took charge of the layout, embellishment and printing of the book. Having worked together for many years for Palakneeti magazine arriving at consensus was pleasant.

Heartfelt thanks to all of you!





## Part One

How important is the human ability to think and act on one's experiences!

It is on the basis of this ability that we discover new things and grow.

- How exactly does this learning process happen? How can learning be fun?
- How to impart the right direction, speed and strength to the learning process?
- As a parent-teacher, it is our responsibility to eliminate the impediments in the process of learning. How can we change ourselves and the situation for this?

Part One seeks to address such issues.

To make the process joyful, creative and meaningful, Khelghar endorses use of play, art and dialogue. This part outlines how to reach out to children with the help of these media so as to inspire them to think.









# 1 Khelghar Means....

We have a dream.  
A dream, of a place.  
A place where children and adults,  
boys and girls, the rich and the poor,  
will all come and enjoy learning together.

A place where there will be  
no compulsion, no tension,  
no humiliation and no obligation  
A place where no one will be afraid.  
A place where no one will be demeaned.  
Where humans will treat humans with humanity.

A place with books and toys and equipment  
and people...  
Ready companions all...  
A place with space to search for one's self,  
to be curious and to explore and  
to do and to find out and to wonder.

A place that will not insist and will not dictate,  
instead, will allow everyone  
to walk or work at their own pace, in their own way.  
A place where the desire for learning will bloom,  
where labour will not be unwanted toil but a joyful want.

We dream of a place...  
A place we should all build,  
nurture and cherish and let flourish.  
A dream. A home for the dream,  
Our Khelghar !

**Shubhada Joshi**

(Translated by : Suhas Paranjape)



'Each child should have an access to joyful learning'. This is our dream and Khelghar is a meaningful endeavour in that direction.

Even the name 'Khelghar' is well contemplated. 'Play' has phenomenal significance in the world of children. The spark in their eyes, the incredible physical response, joy, enthusiasm on the mere utterance of the words – 'Let's play' – speaks a lot. Play is a medium for children to learn about the world. This is a means to develop many capabilities such as agility, observation and decision-making. The elders who want to take up the responsibility of nurturing and enriching children should be all the more aware of this. And that is why 'play' has extraordinary importance in Khelghar. Another place that children like is 'home'. The love, support, enrichment, safety that children get at home is very essential. So, the name Khelghar is formed from two words very dear to children. This is a meaningful space created by adults for children. Here we endeavour at educating those children who find it difficult to get love and nurturing from home due to their circumstances.

To make the dream of joyful learning a reality, it is essential to understand the present educational and social situation.

Educational policies laid down by the Government clearly state the need for an atmosphere conducive for joyful learning and multifaceted development of children. In reality, however, the institutional framework of curricula, textbooks and examinations acquires greater importance, making it difficult for teachers to teach with a view to individual needs of children. Difficulties faced by deprived children are much more serious and complex and, that is why, teachers confront numerous problems in the majority of schools for deprived children and in the classes run in urban bastis. Children don't come to school; if they do, they don't arrive on time and are not regular; they do not have much interest in learning. Children from urban basti generally are noisy and engage in scuffles while those from rural and tribal areas tend to be shy and taciturn.

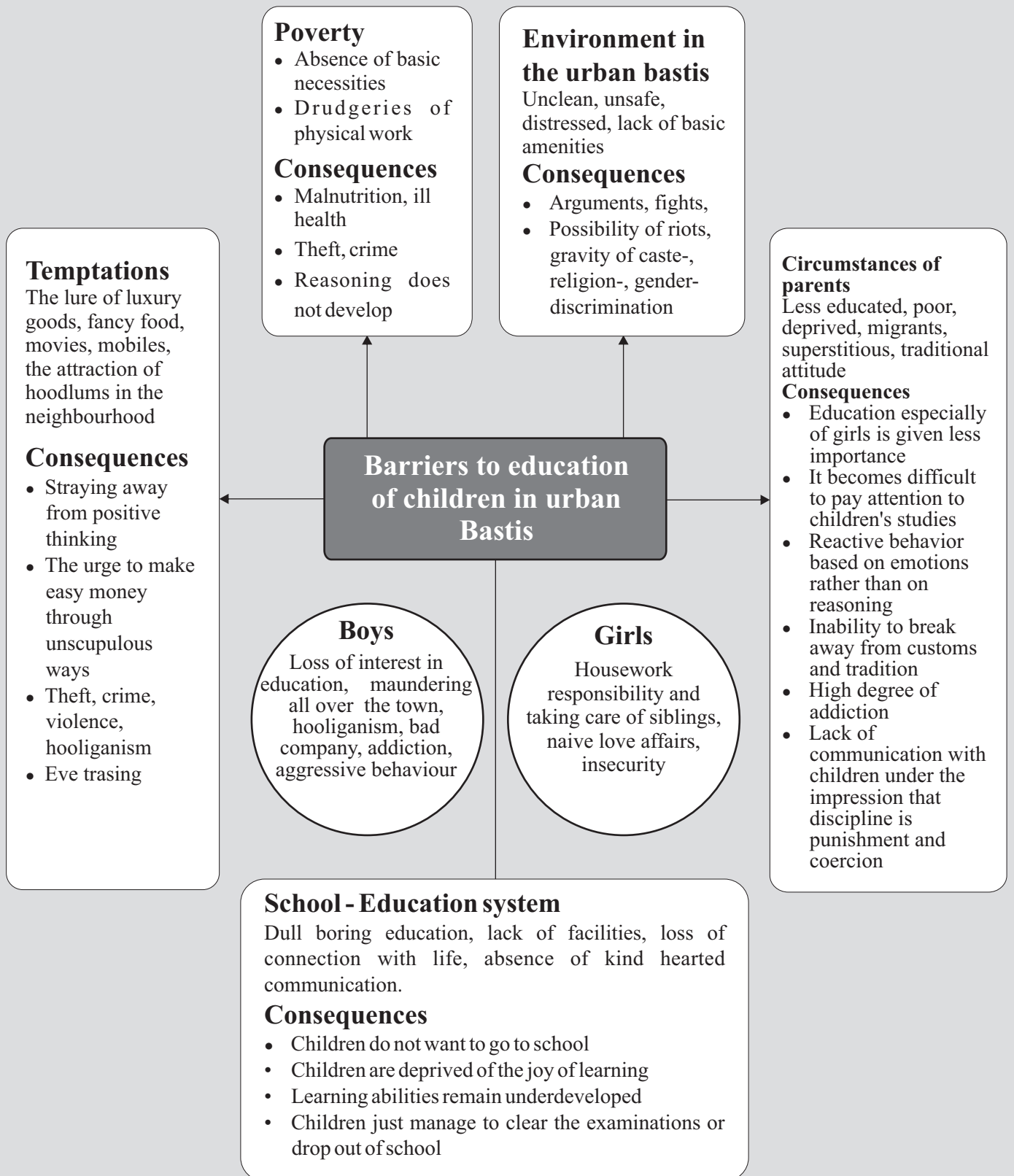
If efforts of teachers are not well received by these children, there are chances of getting dejected. The path becomes imperceptible. If children do not attend the classes, if they do not want to learn, then experiential, creative teaching-learning seems a fanciful goal. The answers to these questions lie in the circumstances and

the deprived surroundings of these children. Without empathy it is impossible to survive and to make any progress in the situation.

Palakneeti Khelghar works in urban bastis. The experience has revealed some blockages in the development of these children. To a large extent these experiences are representative of all the deprived children.

- The biggest problem confronting these children is that of 'poverty'. This leads to bitter experiences from a very early age regarding insufficient food, clothes, educational materials, nurturing and so on. Rarely do they have enough space, sunlight, and well-ventilated homes.
- The atmosphere in these bastis is extremely volatile and unsafe. Scuffles, fights are a regular matter. Often they have to face consequences of caste-based or religion-based riots.
- Many families are migrant families. To a very large extent they are of traditional, ritualistic and superstitious mind set.
- The parents cannot help the children in their studies. Often, they are either illiterate or very less educated.
- Most of the children living in urban bastis attend Municipal Corporation schools. They do not find school interesting.
- Children do not in the least like to attend these schools. Many of them, for those reasons remain





absent once or twice a week resulting in the inability to follow what is being taught. Their learning abilities remain underdeveloped.

- Many families in these urban bastis are migrant families; they may have a different language or dialect different from the language that is used as the medium of instruction in school. The children from such families have major problems in attending schools.
- Often the dialect spoken by these children is different from the standard form of the regional language that is used in the textbooks, leading to difficulties. In



addition, as their dialects are considered inferior, these children end up considering themselves inferior too.

- Many children studying in the fourth and fifth and sometimes even in grade eight were found lacking in reading-writing skills. They have an abiding fear of English and Mathematics. They are not able to overcome this fear to achieve conceptual knowledge.
- On losing their interest in learning, the boys start to maunder all over the basti. Unknowingly they are drawn into friendship with elder boys who have drifted to hooliganism. Soon they get involved in fights and scuffles, petty robberies, addiction, eve teasing and so on.
- Children are normally attracted towards outside eateries, luxury goods and mobile phones. However, they need money for this. Some earn it through odd bits of job while others turn to unscrupulous means. On one hand they are attracted towards the glittery

allures while on the other it is impossible to enjoy any of these. Unable to find a path out of this situation, they may increasingly turn away from optimistic thoughts.

- Girls are prohibited from playing in the streets from the early age of eight or nine. Their life gets restricted to school, house work, taking care of the younger siblings. The only diversion is to watch TV or to gossip with other girls within the confines of the house. This leads to ensnarement in the imaginary world of soap operas. Teasing each other regarding boys, responding to the pestering from the boys, tender age love-affairs are common. However, the brunt has to be borne by the girls. Their school and Khelghar attendance are sometimes permanently blocked; they are sent to the native place and sometimes married off at a young age by their parents.
- Parents in urban bastis work ten to twelve hours a day and so do not get time to inculcate good habits or to discipline their children. Often the attempts made at disciplining are incorrect – shouting, insulting, thrashing, etc., – leading to a break down in the communication between the parents and the children.
- The belief that 'boy is the beacon of the tribe' leads to pampering the boys and assigning heavy workload to





the girls. This leads to boys not being used to work. Since they have never done even tasks such as filling up the food plate, sweeping the house, filling water for household use, etc., the vital skills like hand-eye coordination, concentration remain undeveloped. They remain dependent on women in the house even for their personal work. Due to the workload and restrictions on girls, they have less time to come to Khelghar.

We do find, even in this situation, some boys and girls who go to school, study well, continue their education even after 10th grade and have a loving relationship with their family. However, the above mentioned problems more or less affect all children.

The child learns from the experiences gained from school, home and society. Frequent negative experiences in all these three places create many obstacles in the education of the deprived children. Therefore, the issue of education of deprived children should be understood from both social and educational perspectives. It is intensely realised that academic perspective alone does not suffice. A strong sense of social parenting is also essential.

## The Objectives of Khelghar

### 1) To infuse love for learning

Efforts should be made to remove the obstacles in the process of learning as much as possible so that at least in Khelghar the children would get a positive experience of love, respect and trust.

### 2) Capacity building in children

It is possible to further develop the innate senses - touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste. Moreover, humans acquire the ability to read, write, speak, observe, think, guess, analyse and take decisions and so on. Children, once they understand the joy of learning, strive on their own to excel in these abilities. Khelghar aims to provide complementary opportunities/environment for capacity building.

### 3) Development in the thinking process

Capacity building increases understanding of the situation, as well as develops understanding of what is right and wrong, and thus enriches thinking among children.

We need to help children understand the happenings around them, to understand their own and others feelings and to think about them from different angles. To make

## Khelghar's Guiding Principles–

- The environment should be child-centric.
- No one should be treated unfairly or cheated.
- There should not be any kind of compulsion here.
- Neither punishment nor rewards in any form be used to instil discipline. Efforts should be made to inculcate self-discipline.
- Cooperation should be valued over competition.
- Children's freedom should never be lost sight of, neither by them nor by us.
- There should be an environment conducive to learning – supportive, amenable, courteous, and fostering trust.
- Instead of thinking of temporary benefits, long term implications that benefit all should be considered.

informed decisions and help them implement these decisions conscientiously.

## 4) Inculcating values

At Khelghar we should strive to provide children with experiences that would unravel the meaning of values such as freedom, equality, fraternity and rational thinking.

## How to achieve the objectives?

For joyful learning education at Khelghar should be child-centric, pleasurable, creative and meaningful. These words are very significant. Gradually, the meaning of these words begins to take shape in the minds of Tais and Dadas if they continue the study of creative experiments and research done in the field of education and relate them to their own experience.

We consider it essential that all Tais/Dadas follow a definite regimen when dealing with deprived children.

- Children should have fun in Khelghar. They should never find it boring. They should feel enthusiastic to come to Khelghar. This is not easy, for it puts into trial all creativity, perseverance and study of Tais and Dadas. If Tais and Dadas can win the hearts of the children, then they are accepted as friends and then Tais and Dadas also get involved and start enjoying their work.
- Children need to be understood in order to cultivate friendship with them. Their life experiences, their sensibilities, the changes in them should be constantly

observed. Things that can cause anger should be avoided when dealing with children. For example, Tais and Dadas should always make sure that they do not insult, compare, disrespect, or impose their views on the children even by mistake.

- Discipline is needed when it comes to teaching children. An environment of cordial communication is needed to inculcate self-discipline in children rather than imposing it on them. Use of reward, punishment and competition as tools for discipline should be avoided as much as possible. If chiding becomes essential at some point efforts should be made to reduce its negative effects.
- The dialects children speak should not be looked down upon. They should be readily accepted. It is incorrect to consider their speaking in dialect as improper. Dialect is different from standard language but comparison of any sort to establish hierarchy or superior-inferior relationship should be avoided. The acquisition of standard language is essential for a wide range of exchanges. Children should be helped in Khelghar to gradually learn the standard language through various activities.
- Children need to be involved in the decision-making process regarding Khelghar activities. Only then decision making ability and owning responsibility for those decisions take root in children.
- Khelghar should stay away from superstition and religiosity. The scientific approach to learning should be inculcated in children. They should be encouraged to ask “why?” and to examine everything and therefore, the scientific attitude should be inculcated in Tais and Dadas first.
- Adults also need to check if they have the things, and the capabilities that they want to inculcate in the children. In fact, Tais and Dadas in Khelghar should constantly keep in mind that children will learn and get shaped through the observations and interactions with them.

It is not easy to change the plight of these children, their deprivation and the resultant problems. It is not possible to change these in the true sense unless the wider social system is changed. But we can at least bring some light into their lives. In fact, becoming a slightly better person by getting to know the children better through sensitive interactions with them is one of the work methods of Khelghar.

## Development through play, arts and dialogue

In Khelghar, integration of body, mind and intellect is sought through play, arts and dialogue. They help children learn to think, to make decisions and to implement them as well.

The following topics can be selected for consciousness building through the weekly activities like 'Saturday Khelghar' and 'Discussion Forum'.

- Exploring oneself
- Relationship
- How do we learn?
- My locale
- The influence of media

Of course, Tais and Dadas should be allowed to change these topics and add new ones to these from time to time. These two chapters present how consciousness building can be achieved by using these topics and a variety of educational tools.

## Study Sessions

If a child lags behind in studies there is always a danger that the child may drop out of school. If the child leaves school and starts working on a part-time basis the chances of learning from Khelghar reduce. Khelghar has to take the responsibility for teaching basic concepts from the school subjects so that every boy and girl can get education at least up to the tenth grade.

The child lives in an environment fashioned by language. 'Language' shapes a child's personality. It is mainly through language that the child thinks, expresses thoughts and acquires knowledge. Therefore, 'development of linguistic ability' is very important for the development of children.

The system of school education often creates a fear of mathematics in the minds of children. Children feel alienated from the subject. Actually, mathematics teaches children to reason and to make estimations.

It is very important to teach mathematics to children from both perspectives - developing mathematical skills and practical mathematics related to life. Creative, meaningful language and math lessons in Khelghar are a great way to build children's confidence.

## Special activities

Khelghar classes need to be complemented by a combination of activities like festivals, observation of special days, workshops and fairs.





- Positive things should be given importance by eliminating the undesirable practices in the celebration of traditional festivals like Diwali, Ganapati, Dahihandi, Sankranti, Christmas, Id, etc.
- Along with traditional celebrations, newer ones such as Women's Day, Childrens' Day, Environment Day etc., should be celebrated.
- Exhibition and sale of items made by children, cultural events, get-togethers, study tours, etc.
- Science Fairs, Health Fairs, Reading Fairs, etc., are also very effective to complement learning of academic subjects.

Such activities provide an impetus for work on a particular subject for a few days at a stretch. Therefore, such activities are not only academically beneficial but also helpful to spur up the enthusiasm and joy that fills the mind during the preparation. They strengthen the bond between the members of the Khelghar family.

### Learning-by-doing

'Learning by doing' is a very important Gandhian principle. In Khelghar, gardening, cooking, cleaning, decoration, management of materials, their repairs, and many such things are done in groups by children. It should be a part of their daily work.

### Financial aid

When government sponsored free education ceases, a child's further education may terminate due to financial problems. At such times both counselling and actual financial help are needed.



### Working with parents

Parents are an important link in the work of Khelghar. Parents should send their children to Khelghar. They should know about the concept of Khelghar and the creative methods used here. There should be a bond of trust and dialogue between the parents and Khelghar. Tais and Dadas may learn about the lives of these children, their emotion and problems through the informal chats with parents.

In order to achieve this it is necessary to plan activities such as parents' meetings, workshops, and excursions. Apart from this, parents can also be involved in educational activities like festivals, celebrations, exhibitions at Khelghar.

### Evaluation of work

When we work towards a definite goal we need to check whether we are really reaching our goal. How do we know if we are moving in the right direction?



Tree Plantation by Khelghar Children on a hill



Parents' workshop



- If the children come to the Khelghar regularly, on time and on their own, it indicates that the Khelghar has found a special place in their heart.
- If the children who could not pay attention in the study classes are now sitting attentively in the classroom for ten/fifteen/twenty minutes, it is an indication that they are enjoying the activities in Khelghar.
- If the children start participating and taking an initiative in the classroom activities, in the work at Khelghar, then it should be considered that they have got involved in Khelghar.
- If Tais and Dadas are able to act firmly and kindly even in the most outrageous incidents regarding the behaviour of the children and after that if they notice even the slightest positive change in the behaviour of the children, then it indicates that they have definitely made some progress.
- It would be considered as a major improvement if the children take interest in setting the rules in Khelghar and follow them and try to motivate others to follow them too. If the quarrels are reduced and cooperation has increased when working in groups, it is a major achievement.
- If boys and girls take books to read on their own

initiative and if they start talking about the books then it indicates that the progress is in the right direction.

- If the girls insist that their parents send them to Khelghar, then they are on the path to self-confidence. Even if a few things of this kind are achieved they prove that we are on the right path.

Evaluation activities should be planned for children after a certain period of time so that we can know exactly what they have learnt and where they lag behind. Written examinations can be conducted for assessment of language and mathematics.

However, this assessment should be done not to grade the child but to understand what the child has acquired and exactly where the Tais and Dadas need to help the children to learn better.

Continuous assessment of children can also be achieved through the observation during special events and regarding decision-making, planning, the way they accept responsibility of assignments and through their presentation of lessons.

The objectives, values, structure, the system of evaluation at Khelghar are briefly outlined in this part. The details of these issues are presented in the following chapters.



**High School childrens watching the 'Sun Temple' at Modhera, Gujarat**





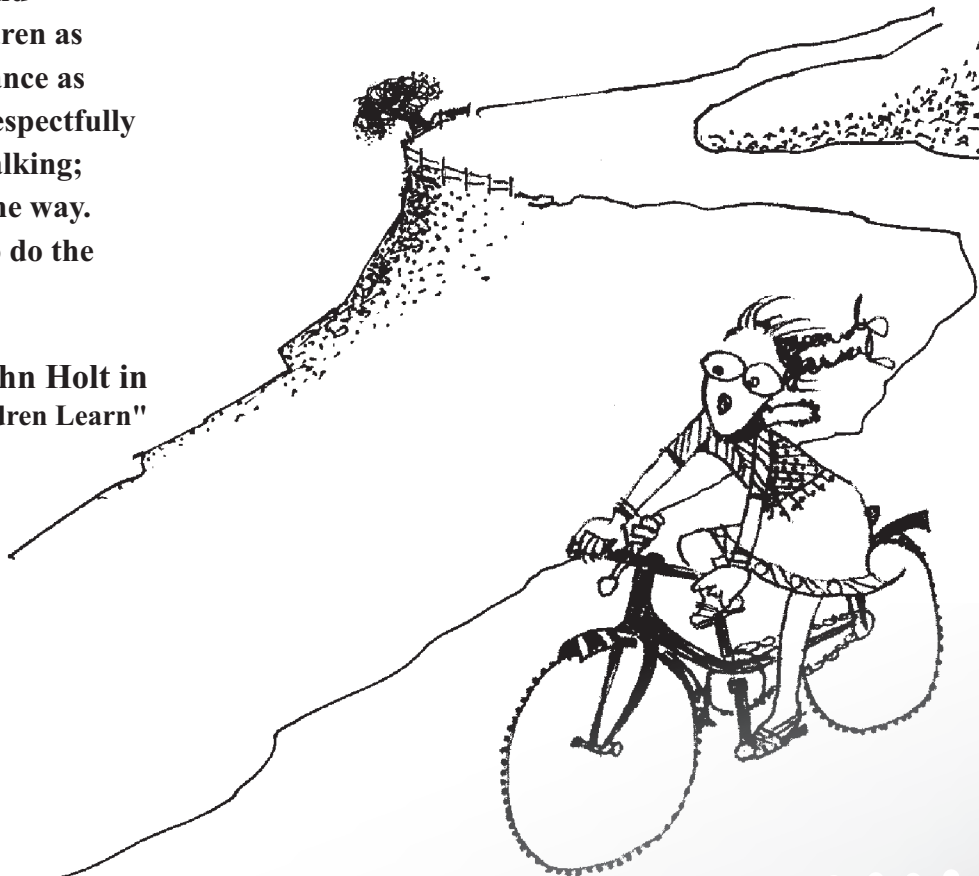


**Learning of Facilitators**

## 2 How do we Learn?

"Birds fly, fish swim, man thinks and learns. Therefore, we do not need to motivate children into learning by wheedling, bribing or bullying. We do not need to keep picking away at their minds to make sure they are learning. What we need to do, and all we need to do, is bring as much of the world as we can into the school and classroom; give children as much help and guidance as they ask for; listen respectfully when they feel like talking; and then get out of the way. We can trust them to do the rest."

- John Holt in  
"How Children Learn"



If we want to ‘teach’ someone, we must first understand the learning process. The structure of this chapter is such that the process will unfold on its own by reflecting on your own experiences. Some responses received from the participants of the Palakneeti Khelghar workshops are also given for help. It will be easy to understand the subject better if you contemplate in a fresh, unbiased way on your previous experiences and the opinions formed by these experiences while reading the unit.

We often encounter responses such as “Learning is stressful”, “We get tense”, etc., when we ask our workshop participants to describe the feelings invoked by the word ‘Learning’. Stress, tension, examinations, ‘be attentive’, ‘be silent’, ‘boredom’, ‘not now’, etc. are the most common responses. In fact, every individual has experienced curiosity, discovery, joy, satisfaction in the learning process at some point.

In Spite of this, it is also true that positive thoughts are not easily invoked when we talk about learning. Why is it so? In this chapter, we shall try to understand what assists and hinders the learning process. Let's first understand how we learn.



- ‘Passed the exam; had a very good score’ is not necessarily the same as developing a good grasp of the subject.
- A lot of practice may make us skillful at something, however, it doesn’t mean that we have grasped the underlying rationale and the causal relations.

So what exactly happens when we learn something?

Let us explore this learning process on the basis of our experiences. For this, a 'dialogue' from the workshop is briefly given below.

"Recollect something you like and you are very good at..." the trainers asked the workshop participants.

"I can cook well," said a lady.

The trainer asked, "What do you think good cooking is?"

"It tastes good. The diner is happy. There are no leftovers. I can well estimate the quantity of food needed for a given number of people. My kitchen is always clean and tidy. Being a working woman, I am meticulous about time management in the kitchen. I can ask help without getting irritated when no one is offering help. My cooking is healthy. It takes into account the nutritional needs of everyone in the household."

"Great! See the range of skills involved in cooking!"

Trainer noted on the board

- **Cleanliness, neatness**
- **A balance of taste and nutritional values**
- **Planning, scheduling**
- **Getting help from others**

"How happily she is narrating this. It proves that she is not weighed down by this work, doesn't it?" The trainer asked.

"Not at all. If we all work together at home, it creates a conducive ambience for communication and understanding," the lady replied.

"How did you accomplish all this?"



Group discussion in Palakneeti Khelghar Workshop

## What exactly is ‘learning’?

Let's ponder over this -

- We often feel we have understood the speech of an orator, but in fact, we may not have understood it.



The lady replied, "I love to eat tasty food myself! Cooking is so much fun. One gets the results immediately. This must have been the main inspiration for my culinary skills! "

"That's a very important point! The inner urge to learn something, to get perfect at it is very important. Only a genuine interest can generate such an urge. Thus learning becomes fun.

The trainer further asked, "Now tell me, how did you develop all these capabilities, where did you learn them?"

"From my mother and mother-in-law. They didn't teach me anything explicitly but I acquired a lot by watching them and helping them. We always discussed issues related to health in our home and both of my parents were hygiene conscious. Overall, the environment at home was conducive to instil good eating habits. "

On the basis of the given discussion, some points regarding the learning process were written on the board.

The trainer wrote '**How do we Learn**' at the centre. Various points from the discussion were written around it.

- **Through action**
- **From observation**
- **From the people in the house**
- **From conversation**

The lady further said, "My mother sometimes overlooked taste when it came to making nutritious food. When I grew up, I learned to make nutritious yet delicious food with the help of cookbooks and computers. "

This was further recorded on the board,

- **From the information available through computers, books, magazines.**

"I like to try out different recipies. Sometimes they turn out well, sometimes they don't. We have frank discussions. So children do not miss any opportunity to pounce on mistakes. This leads to making a mental note of the improvement required next time. "

- Additions to the board
- **evaluation**
  - **Practice + Experiment**
  - **Planning**

The discussion yielded significant points that steered the discussion ahead.

The trainer took it forward,

Cooking is such a routine task that, intentionally or unintentionally, you end up learning it. Do you recollect any good change in you in this regard? "

"When our housing society started a project of making compost using kitchen waste we too put up a garden on the terrace. I started using kitchen waste for these plants. Not only did the garden flourish but, more importantly, nothing was wasted, not even a twig of coriander. I am so happy that we get fresh veggies from our terrace garden." "That's a very relevant point! Let's see what happens in our mind when we come to know something new. "

"Thoughts arise in our mind. I was fascinated by the idea of waste management. The first time I heard about it, I started finding out more about it; tried to understand it. In school we had gardening as a subject. I remembered it all. "

Now the trainer added the intangible things that happen in the mind to the diagram on the board mentioning different ways in which we learn.

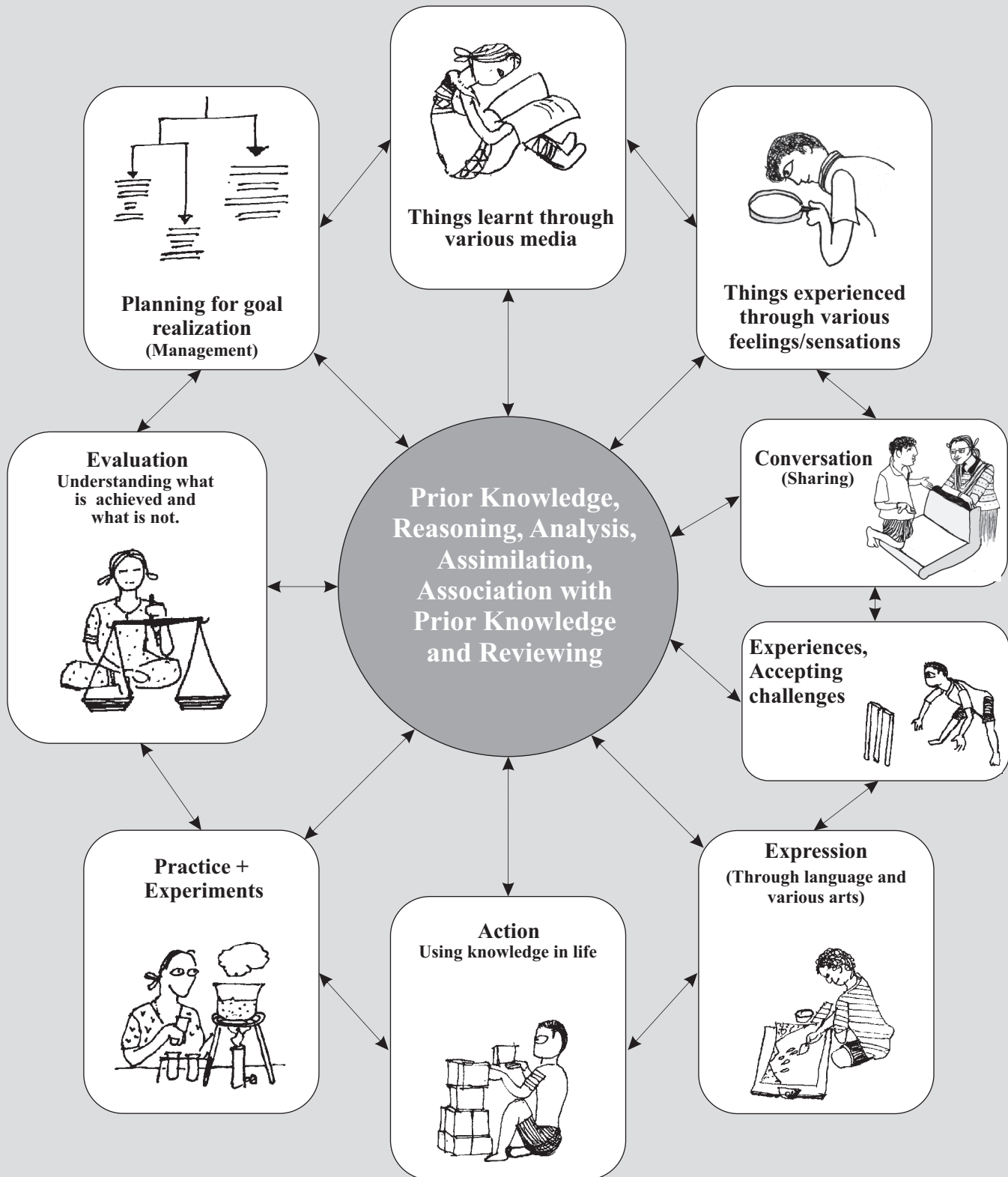
- **Thoughts**
- **Associating with our prior knowledge**
- **Assimilation**

The lady added, "Of course it wasn't that easy! Kitchen compost caused ants, rats, and cockroaches. I was afraid they would enter my home. Then I searched again. I



Session on 'How we Learn' in Palakneeti Khelghar Workshop

# What does Learning Exactly Mean?



heard of vermi composting. This simplified composting considerably."

The trainer wrote on the board

- **To have queries/problems**
- **Searching for solutions to the queries/problems**
- **Thoughts, analysis**

The trainer now made a presentation using the diagram formed on the board. (See the figure on page 24.)

"Listening, reading, experiencing leads to new information. We contemplate on this information. We remember a few things learnt earlier.

Let's call this as prior knowledge. Attempts are made to connect the new information with our prior knowledge. It seems like something new has been learnt. We act according to this new understanding. Doing so raises some more questions again. Search begins for answers to the new questions. This leads to conversation and discussions. Our understanding is shaped by the ensuing contemplation.

'Learning' is thus an ongoing process. It is an important source of joy"

We tried to unravel our learning process through a mindful analysis of our experiences. Now let's see what the education experts have to say about this.

## What does Research say?

### Construction of Knowledge

You may have heard of Jean Piaget. Students of Education pedagogy know that Piaget did basic research on how a child learns. Piaget, a Russian researcher Vygotsky and Bruner's research revealed this process and through experiments substantiated it.

It is very interesting to understand how we learn something. What exactly is this process of knowledge acquisition, this cognitive process?

Jean Piaget proposed the concept of knowledge construction and also corroborated it through his experiments. Central to this theory is the idea that a child constructs her own knowledge. Her understanding develops through her own experiences & own efforts.

The joyous, creative, meaningful learning that we dream

of today has its roots in the research on 'Construction of Knowledge'.

According to Piaget's research, the process of cognition takes place through three stages -

### 1) Experience (schema)

We experience many things through our senses. Through a network of nerves that starts from the brain and spreads throughout the body, the awareness of these experiences reach the brain. These experiences are recorded in the brain. This is a schema.

### 2) Assimilation

We experience many things. Through the connections between the nerve cells in the various centers of the brain, the information from the experiences gets translated into cognition. Our brain already has some prior knowledge (schema) in the context of this experience. This prior knowledge is interpreted in conjunction with the newly obtained information. Decisions regarding action are made accordingly. These are transmitted by the nerves to the right organs of the body and action takes place. At the same time, the newly understood information is stored in the memory. Sometimes the new information is not that important and so is forgotten.

Let's take an example - what happens if we accidentally bite on a piece of chilli while eating?

That sensation travels from the tongue to the brain (schema). There is an exchange between the various centers of the brain and the brain commands, 'Spit out the chilli, drink water.' Immediately the chilli is spit out and water is sipped. In an instant, a long process starting with the experience and ending with action ensued. Experience was followed by reasoning which was followed by decisions being taken and acting on these important decisions. We already had the prior knowledge that 'chillies are spicy and burn our mouth'. Now we learnt - 'First check if there are chillies in the food; take them aside before eating the food.' This is called 'Assimilation', that is, cognition of experience.

This was a very simple and uncomplicated experience. But experiences may not always be simple. They can be very complex.

**To educate is to enable the individual and the society to act according to the understanding reflected in the mind through cognition!**

**- Rabindranath Tagore**

We think about our experiences; we interpret them; this leads to knowledge. We have to act according to this knowledge and also enable society to act.

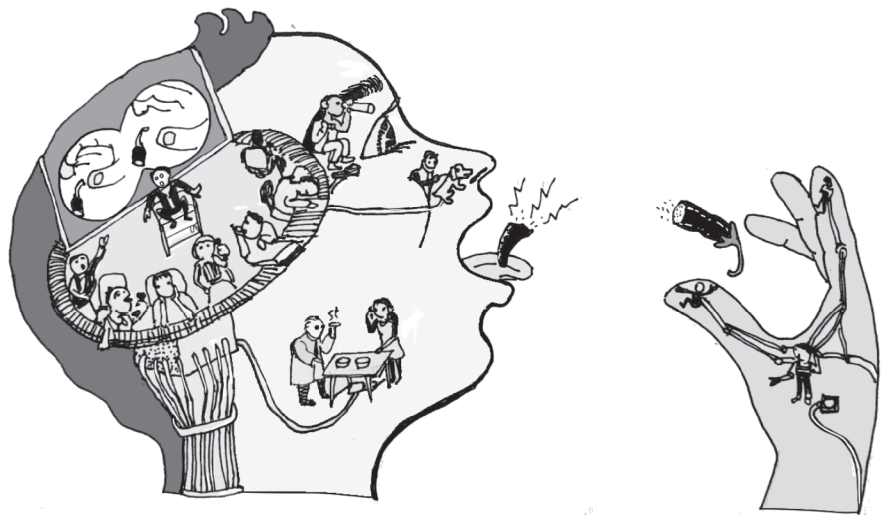
### **3) Adapting new concepts**

#### **(Changes in cognition - Development) (Accommodation)**

Our reasoning moves forward only on the basis of cognition formed through experiences. Decisions are made accordingly. However, at some later time, we may experience something contrary to our prior knowledge or schema. This contradiction leads to a confusion. On encountering new discrepant information, the individual enters into a state of disequilibrium. Only after finding a right way ahead out of this disequilibrium, human beings achieve cognitive development. For example, if someone is of the opinion that punishment is essential to discipline children, on encountering for the first time principles of positive discipline and getting to know the consequences of punishment, the person is confused. It is not possible for that person to accept the new information immediately.

After spending some time in this disequilibrium and after checking the prior knowledge against the recent knowledge and after putting it into practice, it is possible that the person changes his/her opinion and may accommodate the new information. Cognitive change and thus cognitive development, can be achieved only through finding a right way out of the confusion/disequilibration by modifying current schema so that they match conflicting new information.

Knowledge is generated through such activities which are of abstract nature and are continuously transpiring in our brain. The more efficient this matching between the neurons, the faster and richer is the learning process. At this stage of cognition, perspectives are being formed. Greater the experiences at an early age, stronger the coherence of the neurons. The implications are clear - cognitive development is better in children who have access to an environment and experiences conducive to learning and have freedom to act and play without impediments. Brain learns from new experiences and accordingly there are changes in its functioning too.



**(Picture concept taken from a German Poster with Thanks)**



This is called flexibility or plasticity of the brain.

‘Intelligence’ is something that keeps evolving. A very positive thing revealed by the research on the brain is that it is possible to develop cognition through conscious efforts. Some homes and a few creative pre-schools and schools attempt some deliberate experiments in nurturing children on the basis of this research. However, children from the deprived sections of society rarely get

this opportunity. On the other hand, negative experiences that can hinder development are more likely to be encountered. This hampers the development of intelligence. So, Groups like Khelghar working for the education of the underprivileged children, have the responsibility to create a conducive environment for their education and development and also to remove the hindrances in their progress.

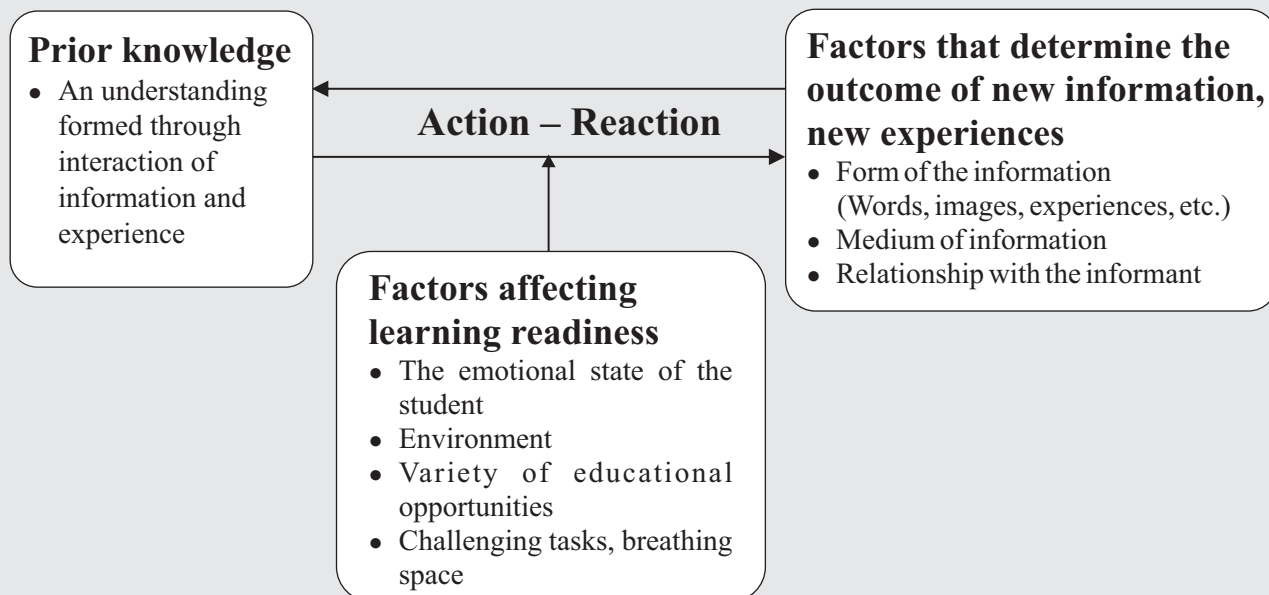
## Classroom learning process

Let us understand the process of learning in a class based on Construction of Knowledge using the following flow diagram -

Some of our opinions and perceptions are formed by combining the experiences and information gained from our daily experiences. This is what we call 'prior knowledge'. New information - experiences interact with this prior knowledge to create a 'new understanding'. If learning in the classroom is to be enjoyable, then the atmosphere in the classroom should be pleasant, amicable, protective of children's freedom, and courteous. The teacher should be aware of the emotional state of the children.

The language in which the children are taught should not be difficult for them; they should get information through various media like words, images, experiences.


The classroom should provide various educational opportunities, challenging tasks and also provide time to find answers to the questions. Children start enjoying learning when this is achieved.



**We have prior knowledge gained through self-effort. On receiving new information or experience, there is interaction between this and our prior knowledge leading to development of new understanding. For this to happen, however, it is very important for us to be ready to learn.**

Reference/ Quoted with permission from Mr. Ramesh Panase's book 'Rachanavadi Shikshan'.





**Education is not  
the learning of facts,  
but the training of  
mind to think.**



**- Albert Einstein**

## **What are the actual circumstances?**

The state of the current education system makes the concept of Knowledge Construction seem like utopia. Did we have such experiences in schools and colleges? Did the school system really have a place for communication, observation, experimentation/learning from trial and error, space to express ourselves and for activity based learning? Did our textbooks, classroom teaching methods have correlation with the life we led? We still carry the scars on our personality of the punishment and the humiliating, disrespectful behavior that we encountered.

Through competitions, exams, ranking, we were stamped either 'smart' or 'stupid'. We still carry the burden of superiority or inferiority complex generated by this.

Our schools were no exception to all the inequalities experienced in the society, such as the caste and religious differences and divides such as poor-rich, boy-girl, beautiful-ugly. The situation is not much different even today.

## **Behaviorism**

It has its roots in behavioral learning theory .

In 1919, when the world was on the brink of the First World War, John Watson insisted that "the process that takes place in a person's mind is abstract, vague. It cannot be proved through evidence. Therefore, it cannot be considered scientific. Instead, behavioural changes should be given importance. By controlling the environment around a person, we can elicit an expected behaviour from him/her. A student can be led one step at a time. Through repetition, learning can be perfected."

The teaching-learning process that developed on the basis of this philosophy, became teacher-centered. Emphasis was placed on external control, such as reward, punishment, assessment, competition, uniform and lecturing.

This system established a regulator-regulated kind of relationship between the teacher and the student.

Watson's system reinforced many of the approaches and methods already present in the prevailing education system. Thus, the practice of 'shaping' children through external control became the norm.

## **What are the things that foster our learning and make it more meaningful?**

To find them out, we are going to take stock of our life experiences. We are going to identify one thing we are proficient in. We want to find out how we became so accomplished at it. Here are some responses received at the workshop:

## Understanding Learning ...

1) "I love cycling and have good stamina too. I want to attempt the Shimla to Khardung La Pass cycle trek. This is because as a child, my father and I used to have long cycle rides. At first, I used to get tired and bored, but he used to comfort me. We would stop, chat. Then, as I got older, I started overtaking him often. Now he started to get tired. We used to stop. Now I think that helped me learn not just cycling but also to move forward. I learned to stop at times and to care for others."

**This makes it clear how 'learning' thrives because of care, encouragement, love, support, working with others, sharing and friendship.**

2) "I love Maths and I am also good at it. In this regard, I recall Kulkarni teacher. She used to teach maths very well. Moreover, she didn't proceed further until every child in the class could solve the problem. Initially, I was one of those students who used to lag behind. But with her encouragement, the fun and challenge in the problems she gave us regularly, I gradually became interested. Gradually I began to understand maths. Sometimes the teacher would give us more and more challenging sums to solve and we would crack them zealously. Sometimes she would ask us to explain the problems to some students lagging behind. The things were learnt even better when we attempted to teach others what we had understood."

**Here one gets to see how learning is enriched by use of teaching methods that would create and sustain interest in learning like encouragement, tolerance, communication, trust, kind help, opportunity and so on.**

3) "I am good at taking others along and making progress at my workplace. I insist that decisions should be taken by consensus. In our childhood we had an open and interactive atmosphere at our home. Whether it was the matter of a simple purchase or a celebration of a festival, we decided together

### Things that 'hinder' the learning process

- Punishment and rewards
- Insults
- Intimidation - Fear – Suppression
- Anger - Resentment - Hatred – Jealousy- Revenge
- Compulsion
- The 'Keep Quiet' ethos
- Suppressing emotions
- Impositions
- Obedience
- Distrust
- Inferiority complex
- Superiority Complex
- Rivalry
- hierarchies and discrimination
- insistence on conventions
- Prejudice
- Superstitions
- Lack of means and opportunities

### Things that help the learning process

- Self-motivation
- Cheerfulness - Happiness
- Freedom of choice
- Space for expressing oneself
- Mutual trust
- Respect for each other
- Self-determination
- Freedom
- Mutual friendship and dialogue
- Encouragement
- Tolerance
- Mutual understanding
- Cooperation
- Equality
- Open mind
- Opportunity to discover oneself
- Critical thinking
- Availability of means and opportunities

and acted accordingly. Everyone was allowed to make their point. Our parents were confident enough to entrust us with some responsibilities and also helped us in case we needed it."

**This example embodies the values of democratic decision-making, freedom, respect, trust, understanding, etc.**

The environment in which children grow up has close association with their learning. A happy, open, cheerful environment that provides a variety of opportunities nurtures children's love for learning. As children get older, they get more conscious of their rights. If adults have respect, trust and empathy in their minds, then it nurtures compassion in children's minds successfully. Independent thinking develops in children only by giving them freedom of choice, freedom of expression, and freedom of thought.

### **What are the things that hinder our learning?**

Now let's think from the other side. Recollect the events, the things that hindered our learning. Our experience in the workshop shows that people are not very keen to talk about these things. However, if we do not ponder over the negative things, we may never know how to overcome these.

1) "My cousins and I were always compared in my home. I felt extremely insulted by this. As a result, I began to feel I am inferior; I lack capabilities. I lost the initiative and enthusiasm to do something new, to learn. I was always tense and anxious. It took a long time to overcome this inferiority complex and to discover my true identity."

Minds of children are very impressionable and the opinions of elders have a big influence on them. Believing every word of the adults, their self-image gets moulded accordingly. So, adults have a great responsibility in ascertaining that children develop a positive self-image.

**Here the 'attitude to appraise through comparison' has become an obstacle in development.**

2) "Our science teacher was very quick-tempered. If the children failed to understand something, or if they couldn't answer some questions or if their homework was incomplete, caning was guaranteed! He was also given to caustic rebuking. This developed an anger in me not just for him but also for the subject he taught. Although my maths was good, I did not pursue a career in science. I had started resenting science."

**Here anger, rage, insult, intimidation, oppression, fear, etc., have become obstacles in learning.**

3) My grandfather was so domineering that no one else had a voice in our grandparents' house. If we obeyed him, we were good; if we didn't, we were nerds! Even our parents could say nothing in front of him. As a kid, I used to listen to him, but as a teenager, I started getting angry at him.

I started getting angry at my Mom and Dad as well, as they too didn't resist his dominance. As a result, gradually my behavior became reactive. I got into the habit of purposefully ignoring suggestions and even got into the habit of talking back rudely. For the sake of opposing everything, I lost many opportunities of exposure to new experiences and new ideas.

#### **In the behaviorist method**

- 1) Only experts create knowledge.
- 2) Teachers distribute knowledge.
- 3) The information stored by the student in the brain determines his/her level.

#### **In the 'Construction of Knowledge' method**

- 1) Students create knowledge themselves.
- 2) The teacher helps the student in this process.
- 3) Student is assessed on the basis of his/ her participation and understanding.

Reference : With thanks from a book by Shri. Ramesh Panse 'Constructive Education'.



**Here, lack of independence, excessive expectations of obedience from children and the resulting anger and resentment in children became an obstacle in learning.**

It is important to include resources that would

supplement learning in Khelghar. It is equally important to help children learn to cope with these obstacles in learning. Many of us have grown up in an environment burdened with such negative influences. So those negative perceptions are often evident in our behaviour too. However, they are harmful to our work in Khelghar. Khelghar is not just for teaching children but also a place where we too learn things at times.

In fact, as long as the process of learning, of working on our own perspectives, of change are intact in us, working with children can be effective. In this chapter we tried to unravel the process of learning by examining our own experiences by inspecting how things worked and sometimes went wrong. In the next chapter we will read how to make the learning and teaching process more efficacious and delightful



**A session in Khelghar Teacher Training Workshop**





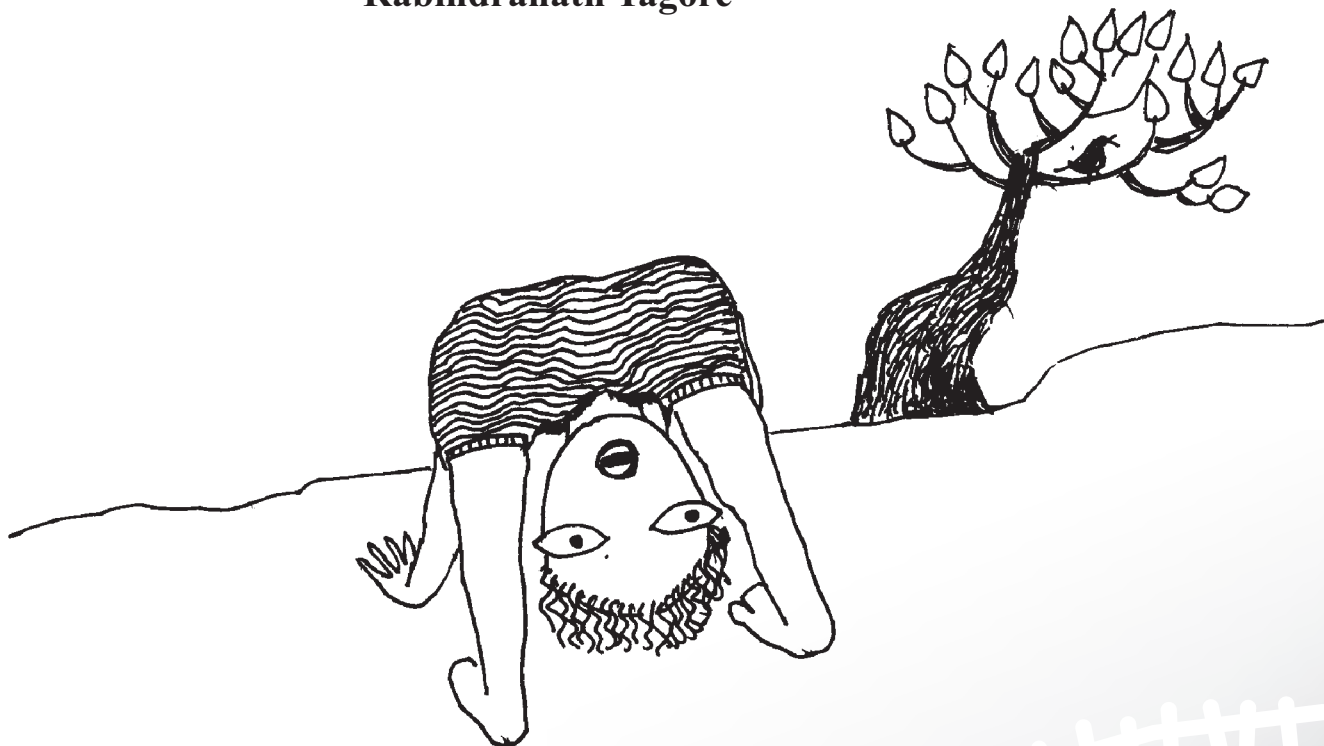


3

## So That Teaching-Learning Flourishes

A teacher can never truly teach unless he is still learning himself. A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame. The teacher who has come to the end of his subject, who has no living traffic with his knowledge but merely repeats his lesson to his students, can only load their minds, he cannot quicken them.

**Rabindranath Tagore**



In the previous chapter we looked at the teaching-learning process. In this chapter we shall look at what elders should and shouldn't do to enrich this process.

A child learns a lot even before formal education begins. It is impossible to separate playing and learning during childhood. It is a pleasure to see a toddler engrossed in her play. One of the many things around her catches her attention. Some objects such as those with wheels and ones that can move, a toy or an object that opens and closes like an umbrella or an object that can make sound stir the child's curiosity.

The child tries to understand the object by playing with it in every possible way. Her whole attention is concentrated on it. The serious expression of absorption on her face and then the joy and the gleam in her eyes on understanding something new are worth observing.

This is the natural way of learning. As we grow older we embark upon conscious learning through the prevalent educational system and move away from these unassuming, natural and joyful learning experiences of childhood.

This happens because of the behavioral pedagogical practices that value discipline over learning and which are under the complete control of the adults regardless of children's sentiments and fancies and which leave no room for communication and expression. In this prevailing method something very valuable is lost. We feel that such a mechanical, controlled, disciplined structure should not suffocate something as delightful as the teaching-learning process.

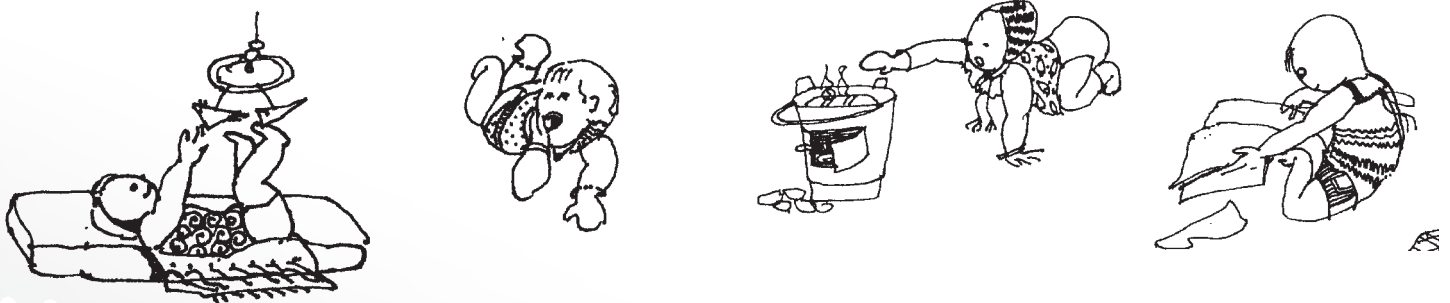
Khelghar has developed its own method of education by studying experimental schools like Aksharnandan-Pune, Srujananand Vidyalaya-Kolhapur, Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan-Phaltan and many other educational organizations and on the basis of a study of research going on all over the world.

This approach is intended to move forward without losing sight of children's natural way of learning. In the last chapter we looked at Jean Piaget's concept of Construction of Knowledge which contends that the child constructs her own knowledge. It is important that we provide children space and time to explore what they like, to express what they feel, to communicate what they think. As adults we want to help them in this learning process. In this chapter we will see how to do this.

## Connecting with children

### Towards vibrant learning

We have all learnt through the prevailing teaching methods somehow. We have also achieved success, financially and in terms of prestige. That is why it often becomes a little difficult to believe in new ideas that challenge these prevalent practices. If we want to assimilate new ideas, we have to reconsider our established views and opinions; we have to check our perceptions. To understand something new, one has to unfasten the doors of the mind bound by preconceived notions. Initially, the mind opposes this process of change. But we have to overcome this opposition and



move forward with effort. It is beautiful to experience the joy of new thoughts arriving like sunshine.

While learning and teaching with children Tai should pause from time to time and observe carefully whether the following things are being achieved.

### **Understanding the child**

Imagine there are 20-22 boys and girls in front of you in Khelghar. You want to teach them some concepts from a subject. You desire to reach out to the children and make them understand the concept. Further, you also want them to assimilate the new knowledge and help them use it in life. However, do the children feel the same way? What is going on in their minds right now? Are they interested in what you want to teach?

Do they want to learn and understand? Do they feel they need that knowledge? Tai should try to understand all this. For this, a genuine attempt needs to be made to listen to what the children have to say. This should be accompanied by perceptive observations. The child may not be able to tell about her situation, the deprivation, the problems. Tai needs to comprehend that.

### **Having Trust in the children**

It is important to trust the children and to gain their trust too. It is essential to understand that a child is not a lump of clay. The child can think independently and hence the adults should have confidence in children's abilities.



**A reading class in Khelghar**

Sometimes in the heat of the moment or because they can't find the right words children say something different than what they intend to say. Adults may get angry at their response; sometimes they may not agree. At such times Tai should trust the child and try to grasp the feelings and thoughts beyond words. Children are more open, honest, forgiving and loving than adults which will soon be experienced on this path of trust and understanding.

To gain their trust it is essential to keep one's word and to protect their privacy. Children observe the behavior of adults very minutely. Children understand well if the adults do not keep their word or if they praise a child for the sake of getting some work done or if they do not take a sincere interest in a child's talk and actions. Adults should be careful not to let this happen while connecting with children.

Adults should be careful not to speak to others about feelings, complaints or secrets confided in them by children.


### **Treating children with respect**

It is the duty of Tais to treat the children with respect and also to teach the children to be respectful.

Everyone expects children to respect adults. Similarly adults should also respect children's feelings, opinions and personality.

One needs to make sure that we don't treat them the way we would not like them to behave with us. For example, talking contemptuously about them, denigrating them, jeering at them, making fun of them, making sarcastic remarks, etc. If adults behave in a way that disrespects children it will damage their self-image; the relationship adults have with the children will deteriorate; and more importantly, children will follow in the adults' footsteps. Traditional Indian education considers 'obedience' an important value. Obedience and respect are two different things. Obedience leaves no space for questions and dissenting opinions. We do not expect such obedience. Adults should listen to the children just as the children should listen to the adults. Communication will flourish if both have respect for each other.

The children attending Palakneeti Khelghar always see



**“A teacher cannot give you the truth. The truth is already in you. You only need to open yourself – body, mind and heart- so that his or her teachings will penetrate your own seeds of understanding and enlightenment. If you let the words enter you, the soil and the seeds will do the rest of the work”**



**Thich Nhat Hanh**

hooligans around them as well as alcoholics who bully and beat others. Children observe and behave the way elders around them do. As a result, some children use vulgar, rude language even in the classroom.

Elders are not respected. In such situations adults should insist that children treat them with respect. They should be told clearly, 'I am bothered by your behavior', without getting angry at them and they should be asked to behave respectfully.

## **Communicating with children**

If you are just beginning the process of teaching you should also work to create desire and curiosity in the minds of the children regarding learning. The learning process is twofold. Just as adults teach children, children too teach adults a lot.

The children will help you in this task. If you can establish healthy communication with the children before, during and after the class hours you can learn a lot about them. This will guarantee children's friendship and enrichment of our sensibility in the long run!

### **The keys to make communication meaningful -**

- Attendance of children, positive changes in their behavior should be taken cognizance of properly; should be appreciated.
- When conversing with children we should talk less and give children the opportunity to talk more.
- Communicate clearly the expectations we have from children. Let's not expect the children to understand these on their own.
- No comparison should be made between children.
- Don't preach; share your experiences, thoughts, feelings directly.
- Don't impose; provide options. The child should be allowed to decide whether to use these or not.
- Don't demand something as if it were your right; suggest.
- If the child approaches to talk to you and if you do not have time at that moment, assure the child that you will definitely talk to her later (fix a time to talk to her).
- Adults should not express their negative feelings in front of children. Children are not mature enough to understand the complexities of these emotions.

Communicating with children in this way helps the children understand that you value them and what they have to say. This will enable you to reach the child.



## The role of Tai

The role of Tais working with children is multidimensional.

### Classmate (friend)

This approach of befriending children and developing a good relationship with them has an important dimension – that of enjoying the time spent with them as a ‘co-student’. For a moment forget your age and become a child as you play with them, explore something with them or simply chat with them. It is worth experiencing!



### How can learning be fun?

- If children are convinced of the need to learn from within ...
- If they want to learn from the bottom of their hearts ...
- If they understand what they are learning ...
- If what they learn can be connected to life-experiences ...
- If the subject of learning touches their feelings; if it can create ripples in their mind ...
- If they can get to the heart of what they are learning ...
- If they see something tangible resulting from the knowledge they get...

Then the child will develop an interest in the learning process.

Every teacher should remember here that every child is unique and every child has a right to be as she is.

## Facilitator

The second role is that of a facilitator, of one who provides impetus to children's thoughts and actions. It is the facilitator's job to create a nurturing environment for children where they will be curious to know more, where



they would want to say something on their own, where they can have new creative ideas. Tai should be primarily in this role.

## Teacher

The third important role is that of the teacher!

While teaching them something new the teacher should link it to what they already know. Different methods and tools should be used to ensure that the new concept is grasped by every child in the class.



## Mentor (Counsellor)

The fourth role is that of a guide or a mentor. Adults need to guide the children only when the children have questions, when they are stuck and when they approach the adults on their own for guidance.

The counsel and instructions given when not asked for are not just useless but also create rift in the relationship.

In the process of Construction of Knowledge the teacher has to go through all these roles effortlessly. Let us see through an example.

## While actually conducting a lesson ...

The fourth grade group is in Khelghar. Tai wants to teach children 'adjectives' today. She wrote 'Visheshan' [Adjectives] on the board.

"Tai is going to teach us something special today," Sameer chipped in as usual. Tai smiled.

"Why just today, Tai teaches something special every day!" said Reshma.

"What's 'special' Tai? Tell me!", Sameer said.

"You'll know, you'll know, wait a minute!"

## The beginning of the lesson

"Today everyone will tell one good quality of the child sitting to your right, okay?"

It was a bit difficult for these children who were used to telling Tai some complaints about each other daily, to tell a good quality about each other.

Raju made an attempt – "Radha reads and writes well."

"Can you say something about Radha in one word?"

"Radha is bright."

The children started coming up with descriptions of qualities about each other such as nice, calm, enthusiastic, playful etc. Sometimes the children and sometimes Tai would give a 'word' to those descriptions.

Tai was adding new, different words such as immaculate, kind, sensitive. The list was being made on the board. Radha - bright, Sameer - enthusiastic etc.

## The main content

Tai explained, "Sameer, Radha are the names, aren't they? And the words that you have used to describe them tell us what is 'special' about that boy or girl; they are descriptions of those names.

Adjectives are words that describe a person, an object, or an event that a noun refers to.

Sameer, do you understand now what is 'special' today? We are going to learn about adjectives today!"

She then gave them a few sentences and asked the children to identify the nouns and adjectives in them. For example -

- 'Umesh is plump but agile.'

- 'Laddus are expensive but tasty.' And so on.

From these, a few more pairs of nouns and adjectives appeared on the board.

Then Tai showed some paintings of nature. Have you seen such scenery around you? One picture was of rain and trees, another was with the bright Sun and green pastures. Sapna said, "The first picture has dark green shade and another picture has light green shade. Every shade of green is different."

Suddenly a feather came inside the class. Children got excited. They started running around to pick up the feather. It was so light! Children had great fun!

Later tai drew their attention to different meanings of the word 'light'.

Dark green and light green – here 'light' is used for a faint shade.

Light feather – here it is used to depict weight of the feather.

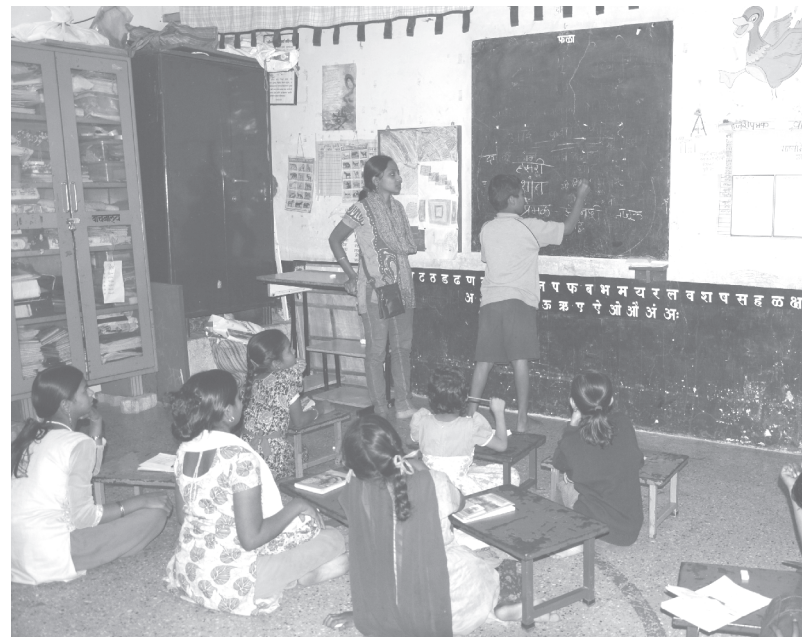
In 'bright light' – here light is used as a noun.

Children realized how the meaning of a word changes with the context.

## Practice activities

Then Tai asked the children to look at the lesson 'Idgah' from the language textbook. After reading the first paragraph the children were asked to find the pairs of nouns and adjectives.

"Eid is here after full thirty days of Ramazan fasting. What a beautiful and pleasant morning! The trees are



**A lesson about Adjectives at Khelghar**

unusually green, the fields unusually lush and the sky unusually red. Look at today’s sun. How sweet and how cool! As if it is greeting the whole world on Eid.”

[From T. C. Ghai’s translation of Premchand’s short story Idgah]

<b>Adjective</b>	<b>Nouns</b>
Eid	day
Thirty	days
Wonderful, beautiful	morning
Green	trees
Sweet, cool	Sun
Lush	fields
Eid	greetings

Tai wanted to introduce the types of adjectives. “Wonderful, beautiful are describing words. That is, ‘adjectives of quality’. The word 'thirty' denotes the number of days. So it's an ‘adjective of number.’”

### Stabilization of the concepts

Tai then divided the children into four groups and gave them four items - a book, a dupatta, a chalk, and a tamarind. The children were to discuss and write a description of these things in their notebook. Tai stimulated their thoughts by writing on the board some points like colour, shape, touch, use of that object and what it is made of. The result was descriptions such as - "This book is charming. The pictures are colourful. I also

went on a journey of colours with Radha." Tai wrote the words obtained from each group on the board. She also added to these - a meaningful book, a soft cloth, brittle chalk, zesty tamarind and so on.

Tai tried to analyse the adjectives obtained from the children to reveal the fun in them. The children were also hooked by ‘imaginative’ and other similar adjectives like creative, selective and attractive.

Tai then asked the children to write down the pairs of nouns and adjectives encountered during the class. The children got busy in recollecting and writing them down. Realizing that they had a treasure trove of words they felt so rich.

Tai further asked, "Children, what is the function of adjectives in a sentence? Look at the sentence – ‘Today Sapna is wearing beautiful, colourful clothes’, what would have gone wrong if there were no adjectives in this sentence?"

" Tai, there is no fun in just saying, "Sapna is wearing clothes", said Radha.

“The words ‘beautiful, colourful’ help the picture to emerge in front of our eyes”, Akash said.

“Indeed, you put it well. Adjectives give exact meaning to the sentence, don’t they?”, Tai explained.

### Evaluation

In the end, Tai gave them a game of nouns and adjectives to play by forming two groups. The children in both the groups were given numbers serially. Tai would call out a number. The child from the first group with that number was to say any noun and the child of the same number in the other group would suggest an adjective for that noun. As the groups received marks children tried hard to recollect words to outdo the other group. If a word was repeated it got no marks. So the contest became even more interesting.

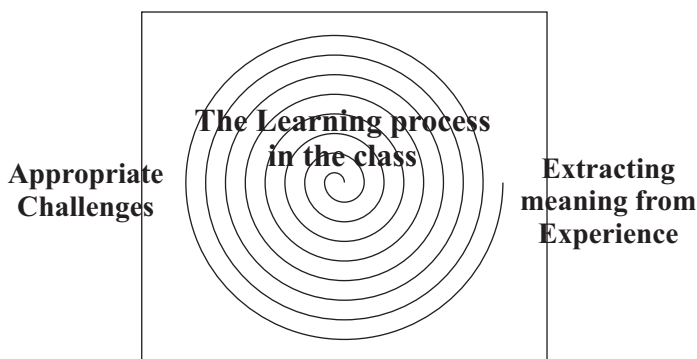
Let’s see what Tai and the children discovered and understood through different activities done together during this class.

What is an adjective? Types of adjectives, importance of adjectives etc.

What are the things covered as per the ‘construction of knowledge’ concept that we saw in the previous chapter?


At the beginning of the lesson the teacher was interacting

### Openness - trust in the atmosphere



### Ample opportunities of experience

Ref - Ramesh Pnase’s book in Marathi ‘रचनावादी शिक्षण’ (constructivism in Education)



**He who laughs with  
children is a good  
teacher and he who  
laughs at children is  
a bad teacher!**



**- A. S. Neil,  
with thanks from 'Summerhill'**



## Who is a good teacher?

- 1) It is up to the student to learn! The teacher just has to help the student in her learning process. So a good teacher is one who loves to help and can help others and one who does not consider this help a 'favour'.
- 2) The teacher should love the children. This love should be palpable. Children need to feel it.
- 3) S/he should be eager to learn, to know new things.
- 4) S/he should make efforts to understand the students, their problems and circumstances.
- 5) S/he should be able to communicate well through language, touch, acting and arts.
- 6) The teacher should be eager and open to new experiments.
- 7) One who has a good grasp of the subject but does not have the pride involved in 'I know everything' ... is a true teacher!
- 8) The teacher should put challenging things before children and motivate them to explore these further.
- 9) The teacher should have the courage, perseverance and dynamism to change herself and the situation.
- 10) The most important thing is that the teacher should be a good 'human being'.

The list of criteria of a good teacher does not end here but the list begins anew.



with the children and was making them think. She was in the role of a facilitator. She then entered the role of a teacher while actually teaching adjectives and their types.

She again became a facilitator in the practice activities and finally took on the role of a classmate (children's friend) while playing the game of nouns and adjectives.

- Both the children and Tai were immersed in the teaching-learning process. The children were actively involved in the process.
- The lesson started with the children's prior knowledge of the subject.
- The children got a lot of opportunities to find out for themselves, to check and present what they found in front of everyone.
- Tai was helping and encouraging the children to move on from their current state of knowledge. She was giving direction to the thought process of the children

at the right time and at the right place. Tai was providing them new information from time to time.

- Tai had creatively planned the lesson so that the children could learn with joy.
- The children worked on all the four skills of language - listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- The concepts learned were amply practiced, yet the children did not get bored with the practice.

The children and the lesson both were evaluated through the last game. Tai could know who had grasped the concepts and who needed further help. It also became clear as to the direction in which the lesson could further proceed.

A successful teaching-learning process is thus a living, flourishing and enriching activity for both the children and adults alike.



### Trip to the Quarry



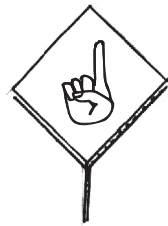




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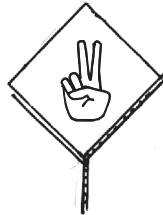
## To Inculcate Positive Discipline

If you want to do one thing for kids



then stop spanking them.

If you want to do two things



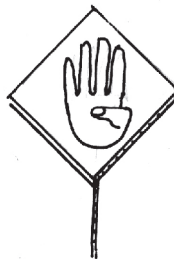
then don't be angry with them and don't insult them.

If you want to do three things



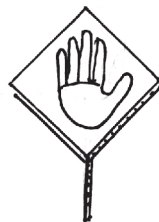
then don't scare them, don't use any enticement and don't indulge them too much.

If four things can be done



then don't preach to them continuously. Refrain from constant pampering.

If there are five things to be done



then teach the child to do by herself what she wants you to do for her. Don't make her work light; don't take it away.

**- Gijubhai Badheka, (1885-1939)**

(With thanks from Palakneet, January, 2003)

# How to discipline children?

The most annoying problem for teachers when working with children is that of class control!

'Children don't listen at all.' 'They are constantly talking to each other.' 'Some unruly children disturb the class.' These are the genuine complaints from teachers. Without the cooperation of the children in the teaching-learning process all the brilliant ideas cherished in mind literally shatter. Teaching-learning gets impossible. There are generally five class control measures used in schools -

- 1) Use of punishment, intimidation and coercion.
- 2) Use of rewards for good behavior.
- 3) Isolating the unruly child.
- 4) Giving the unruly children some important responsibility to make them feel special.
- 5) The teacher punishes herself.

These five methods have more disadvantages than the advantages.

The path of punishment creates negative emotions like fear and anger and the path of using reward for good behavior is a way to lure them. Neither is right. We shall be dealing with this issue in detail in this chapter.

The third way is to send the unruly child out of the classroom or to isolate her. This is a kind of punishment. It stops the child from learning. As in the fourth measure, giving a child special importance is in a way pampering her and may in fact make her further uncontrollable. Besides, other children may infer that 'unruly children get respect in class', which is also not good.

The fifth way – a teacher punishing herself – in no way strengthens the child-teacher relationship.

Teachers are clueless and confused regarding the class control. What to do if all the conventional ways of class control are not advisable? Before finding the answer we need to understand the reasons behind these problems.

## Disadvantages of punishment

The traditional way is to punish children for restraining them from undesired behaviour and to reward them for motivating them for desired behaviour.

If we use these ways, it seems in the beginning that the children are behaving as we want them to; but this effect

does not last long. Given the opportunity the children resume their former behaviour. Punishment affects their minds adversely. It creates anger and resentment in their minds for the person. It breaks down the communication between them; in fact, it shatters the trust between them. Sometimes it gives rise to apprehension and fear. It hurts the child's self-esteem. Sometimes it may give rise to an inferiority complex in the child. Sometimes a child learns to lie to avoid punishment. The child gets more involved in thinking of ways to avoid being caught next time.

Brain-research studies shed much light on these issues. Evolution of the brain has three stages:

The first stage is of reptiles. At this stage, the animal's brain is only capable of performing functions such as feeding, protection and reproduction.

The second stage is of mammals. Now reproduction requires feelings of attraction, love and happiness. So at this stage of evolution the emotional centers in the brains of mammals are more developed. Yet emotions are still in their infancy. Whenever there is a crisis, feelings of anger and fear are aroused in the brain. Accordingly one of the three measures is planned for protection.

- 1) Flight
- 2) Fight
- 3) Fright

During the third stage of evolution the human brain developed a thinking centre, 'new brain' (neo cortex). So it became possible to make a rational/cognitive decision instead of just a decision based on emotions.

However, when a 'crisis' situation arises for a person, (for example, fear of punishment as discussed earlier), the brain centre of the second stage mentioned above gets activated immediately and spontaneously. The blood supply to the limbs is increased to fight or escape. The blood supply to the respiratory and circulatory organs also increases so that the limbs can work harder. Naturally, the blood supply to the brain is reduced.

Therefore, the neocortex does not get a chance to think. Consequently, punishment results in children responding in ways such as withdrawing for the sake of self-protection, behaving rudely or the thinking process freezing up due to fear. Sometimes a temporary change is seen in children but it does not last. Self-motivated disciplined behavior is not achieved.



At such times children get inclined to ignore what others say or they may behave well in the presence of teachers and recklessly in their absence or they may destroy evidence of reckless behavior. As a result class-control becomes even more difficult.

A child / individual who is constantly exposed to fear, humiliation, feelings of helplessness and violence gets so enveloped by feelings of insecurity that their new brain (thinking brain) stops functioning. Their brain forever begins to function at the level of the second-stage mammal's brain.

When dealing with negative emotions their rational thinking stops. This process is called 'downshifting'.

On the whole, punishment, intimidation have the effect of stunting the child's development; so it should be kept in mind that 'punishment' is not the way to discipline children. For change to take place in children their self-motivation should be awakened; self-discipline should be inculcated in them.

### **Disadvantages of rewarding**

Rewards are given for good work; they provide encouragement. So how can they be detrimental?

After pondering over it for a while one realises, should a child behave well just for the sake of a reward? No. Our goal is to make the child a better and more responsible person. Regardless of this original purpose the child is being set a price in the form of a reward for her good behavior. Children will act as the elders wish them to for the sake of the reward for some time. But then the children's expectations escalate. They demand higher prices. Gradually, their interest in the prize may diminish.

Children start thinking of simpler ways to achieve what they want. The reason why we want them to behave well does not reach them.

Luring children with rewards, in a way leads to corruption. Isn't it a bribe to say, 'I will give you some chocolate if you do this.'? Rather, it is more appropriate to stimulate the child's self-motivation by communicating how that task will give the child joy and benefit her.

Inducement-punishment is an extensive topic. Rewards and punishments do not lead to lasting changes in a

person's attitude and behavior. Change occurs only through self-motivation. Therefore, stimulating self-motivation should be the objective of our measures.

### **Towards positive discipline**

We saw the disadvantages of all the conventional methods used to turn children around. But what to do then? Let us understand the answer to the question of how to discipline children.

Adults and children are not two separate groups, one who disciplines and the other being disciplined. They want to live happily with each other; they want to learn and teach each other and make life wholesome and prosperous with each other.

In order to achieve this, we need to step out of the role of controller and enter the role of a person who helps in the development of children where necessary. We need to work with the children, not for the children.

In the context of positive discipline Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs have the following to say.

We have two important needs:

- 1) We want to feel wanted by the group.
- 2) We want to have an important place in the group.

Humans have an inherent need to 'belong', to 'fit in', be 'accepted / approved of' by others. Cooperation is an innate motivation. However, the development of this motivation depends to a large extent on the surrounding environment. Environmental factors such as punishment, disrespect, humiliation, neglect make the child feel insecure and discouraged. The constant realization that I am not being included in the family, class or group creates a feeling of insecurity, anger, fear, frustration in the child's mind. The child becomes discouraged and begins to show unruly behaviour.

This unruly behaviour can be of the following types.

- Attempts at attracting attention
- Insisting what I say is right.
- Seeking revenge.
- To withdraw; to give up.

The surrounding environment is often responsible for a child's maladaptive behaviour. Their behavior depends to a large extent on how the elders treat them. Adults should be particular about certain things in order to instill self-discipline in children.

## Multiple intelligence

The school assessment system categorises children on a scale ranging from intelligent to unintelligent. There are actually eight types of intelligence according to Howard Gardner. With the exception of children with learning disabilities all children can develop all types of intelligence if given the opportunity and guidance. Each child can be good at two or three of these types of intelligence. A knowledge of the strengths and limitations of each child from this perspective may go a long way in making teaching more effective. These eight types of intelligence are:

### 1) Linguistic Intelligence:

Linguistic intelligence is considered important in school education. Ability to use precise vocabulary, greater expressive power and better comprehension of poetry demonstrate a person's linguistic intelligence.

### 2) Logical Mathematical Intelligence:

People with good logical mathematical intelligence can solve problems very quickly. They come up with the most appropriate answer by considering several contexts simultaneously. This type of intelligence is the most well-known and is highly valued in the educational system.

### 3) Musical intelligence:

Some people seem to have a special understanding of music even before the opportunity for actual training in music becomes available. Music is always around us from childhood but some children show a greater ability to notice it and to comprehend it.

### 4) Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence:

Let's take the example of Sachin Tendulkar. When the ball approaches him he strikes a six with his bat. The speed, direction and change in the course of the ball due to his strike are not a matter of coincidence. It is a well contemplated thought, a thought pregnant with action. This is possible because Sachin has great physical abilities.

### 5) Spatial intelligence:

Map reading is an expression of spatial intelligence. An object looks different from different places. Guessing what it will look like or finding a desired path through the

sixty-four squares of chess board demonstrates this intelligence. A painter, sculptor, as well as a surgeon need to have good spatial intelligence.

### 6) Intrapersonal Intelligence:

The main part of this type of intelligence is to have the capacity to understand oneself, what one thinks, what one feels, why and how that is different from others. We live with ourselves for many years. People who are well aware of their own abilities, limitations, areas for improvement and self-motivation make full use of all types of intelligence, enhance them and make progress.

### 7) Interpersonal Intelligence:

The main components of this type of intelligence are the awareness of the mental state of different people, their behavior patterns, desires, interests as well as an ability to work efficiently with others. One wonders why the religious gurus and political leaders have so much impact on society. The reason is interpersonal intelligence which makes it easy for them to accurately understand the perspective, the thinking of others and then to give them the desired direction. Teachers, mentors and parents should make efforts to improve this type of intelligence.

### 8) Naturalist Intelligence:

People who are good at this type of intelligence love spending time in nature, observing nature, studying, working and conserving nature. They are also good at this kind of work.

Reference: Sanjiwani Kulkarni's article 'Spectrum of Intelligence: Howard Gardner' in Sudharak, July-August issue, 2002.

## **Basic Principles of Positive Discipline :**

### **1) Understanding the child**

Even if you get angry because of some undesirable behaviour of the child you should strive to go beyond that anger to fathom the reasons underlying that behaviour. One can comprehend children's behavior only through a truly compassionate attempt at grasping their sentiments, their preferences, their circumstances and its effect on them. This understanding will lay the foundation for the measures to be taken.

### **2) Assertiveness and mutual respect**

Being compassionate towards children's feelings and respecting them is 'understanding', while teaching children to respect rules, other people and circumstances is 'assertiveness'. Imposition of opinions by elders on children is not assertiveness. Assertiveness requires a lining of empathy and flexibility. However, this does not mean that any kind of misbehaviour from children should be tolerated. At such times elders should neither get angry nor ignore such disorderly behavior. They should talk with children and make children understand how elders feel about their behavior.

Empathetic attempts at understanding children, respecting them, trusting them is as important as being firm about adhering to the established rules.

### **3) Winning children's trust**

In the previous chapter we have seen how it is important to trust children and to be worthy of their trust. There is one more important point in this regard. When children lie to adults, adults lose faith in them. Adults need to understand the underlying reason why the children want to hide certain things from them. Children are afraid that if adults come to know about these things they will get angry and punish them. This fear forces them to lie. Adults should accept children the way they are. If we adopt a positive perspective that the mistakes children make are also an opportunity for them to learn we shall be less angry at their unruly behavior. It will reduce fear in children's minds and make the relationship more transparent.

### **4) Taking time to calm down**

Anger, fear and stress have a negative influence on our thinking. At such times we need to give ourselves as well as to the children time to calm down. Engage yourselves in something that interests you. It will help clear the

clouds of strong emotions, calm down the mind and also help to review the incident constructively.

### **5) Getting Co-operation from children**

It is important to involve the children in problem solving. This can happen only if the behaviour of the adults has instilled trust in the mind of the children for them. To gain children's confidence we first need to listen carefully to what they are saying. Even if we can't agree with a child her feelings should be respected. We need to ensure that what we think the child wants to convey and what the child really means are the same. Instead of making accusations and insisting that the child admits her misconduct the focus should be on discussing the causes and the possible consequences of what happened. Encourage the children to find a solution on their own.

### **6) Motivating them**

Child's confidence increases manifold on being assured by the adults that she can definitely do something that she intends to do. Encouragement should not stop at praise or appreciation. Children need to be provided with a motivating atmosphere. The feeling that each member in the group wants me is also a strong motivating factor.

Teachers can motivate children in different ways, such as-

- By praising their good behavior in front of everyone.
- Noticing and appreciating even a small good change in the child's behaviour.
- Making the child feel welcome to the class.
- By understanding the children's emotions and sentiments; by talking to them about it.
- Expressing love, concern, affection for the child through words and touch.
- Protecting children from physical or mental violence.
- By giving them the opportunity to express themselves in their groups.
- Inspiring them to practice self-assessment.

### **7) Involving children in the decision making process**

Everything to do with children must be done with their consent. When children are involved in the decision making process they tend to take the responsibility for their decisions. Instead of meekly following the decisions taken by others it is always more empowering for the children if they are allowed to make their own decisions.

The learning-teaching process turns meaningful and enjoyable if the classes are conducted in a participatory manner and by connecting the new learning with the children's prior knowledge. As children develop interest in the process chances of indisciplined behavior are also reduced.

Everyone in the classroom has the freedom to act as they please only up to some extent. A set of common rules should be adopted so that everyone in the class can enjoy learning. The rules should not only be for children but also for Tais.

These disciplinary rules for the classroom should be made with the participation of as many children as possible. A chart of the rules arrived at through group discussion should be displayed in the classroom. Teachers should make it clear that it is the responsibility of everyone, not just the teacher to keep an eye on whether each person follows the rules or not. The teacher should also refrain from assuming this responsibility each time. These rules should be reviewed from time to time. Difficulties in following the rules should be discussed. New rules should be made accordingly. Everyone should be involved in deciding collectively

### **Make no comparisons between children**

Teachers like some children in any group and the faults in some children keep bothering them. There is a possibility of being partial inadvertently. Every child is unique. Every child has some special qualities which the teachers are yet to know. Liking or disliking a child also depends on the teacher's former experiences and prejudices. We need to go beyond these preferences and accept them as they are. It is not appropriate to make comparisons between them in front of the other children in the group. Moreover, the teacher should be careful that such comparisons do not arise in her mind too. Children often absorb the opinions of the elders. This greatly influences their self-image. The tendency to underestimate oneself found in many people around us is often an outcome of such negative comparisons.

what to do about the children who do not follow the rules. During the discussion Tai must consciously resist the desire to dictate the expected rules. Children are more likely to follow the rules if they have arrived at those rules. Tai must clarify the need for having a structure or a discipline; but then the rules should be left to the children to be formed. Then she should make a chart of all the rules and display them in the classroom. If the rules are not followed, point at the chart. If the rules are broken again and again everyone in the class should discuss about it and find a solution.

It is not possible to involve children in some decisions such as the time allocated to each activity in Khelghar or the internal composition of the class hours etc. At such times if the children are explained the rationale behind the rules they will gladly agree to follow them. Some children make it difficult to teach in the classroom. Such children are to be dealt a little differently. It is natural for a teacher to get angry when a child repeatedly misbehaves. At such times it is essential that teachers need to control their anger. If reacted impulsively under the influence of anger it is more likely that the teacher follows the prevailing ways of punishment. Such problems are not likely to be resolved immediately. Patience and gradual efforts are essential.

It is very important to avoid a negative perspective towards the child in such cases. It must be remembered that not the child but her particular behavior is incorrect. Teachers need to have faith in the possibility of improving a child's behavior through sustained efforts. There should be discussion in this regard in the classroom with cool heads.

- First of all, give the child a chance to talk about why she acted this way.
- Then let the children who were harmed by her behavior express themselves.
- Encourage everyone to think about the consequences of her behavior.
- Everyone should decide together what to do next and the decisions should be implemented and followed with the cooperation of children.

Some may feel that this dialogic way of communication wastes a lot of time. The traditional way of punishment may lead to good control of the class temporarily but then, through repeated occurrences of such incidents a lot of class time is ultimately wasted. The development



achieved through the process of dialogic communication takes place in stages but is sustainable.

Let's look at an example.

A session in fifth grade was on. Teacher was conducting a language game with the children seated in a circle. The game was in full swing but Akash and Akshay were busy in mischief making. After neglecting their behaviour for some time, not just the teacher but some other children too got angry at them. 'What shall we do now?' the teacher asked. The children were irritated by then and started reprimanding Akash and Akshay. The teacher stopped them and suggested, "Let's talk about this in detail tomorrow."

'Right now we are all angry. In an angry mood the discussion will not be fruitful and we cannot arrive at good solutions. We should all take time to calm down,' explained the teacher.

The next day the teacher came up with the idea of an "appreciation round". Everyone was to tell a good thing about the child on their right. No one was ready to appreciate Akshay and Akash. "You still seem to be angry with Akash and Akshay," Teacher said. "That's fine. But try not to let your anger influence today's discussion. We want to find an answer that benefits everyone."

In response the children started saying, "Teacher, Akash - Akshay always behave like this." "It is troublesome for the whole class." "They don't listen even after warnings." "These days you don't use punishments, so they misbehave more."

The teacher asked, "What could be the reason that they both behave like this?"

"They can't sit in one place for a long time!"

"They couldn't recollect words quickly so..."

"They are mischievous," the answers came.

Now the teacher asked Akash and Akshay the reasons for their misbehavior. They looked down. The teacher told him, "Speak freely, we all want to know what you have to say." Akash said, "We were bored, teacher." "At first I tried but I was not able to recollect words," Akshay said. "Everyone laughed when I told the wrong word, then my attention got diverted from the game."

Then everyone started thinking about a solution.

"If these two start misbehaving they should be sent home." Many shared this opinion.

"Teacher, make them sit with you on either side."

"Teacher, explain to them how their behavior harms the class!"

At this stage the Teacher said, "It is not just my responsibility to see that Akash-Akshay behave well but it is the responsibility of all of you and theirs too. So suggest ways to make them get involved in the class and stop them from making mischief." Now the discussion started in another direction.

Alka had an idea. She said, "If the two start misbehaving everyone should shout together, 'Come on! It's enough!' Everyone liked this.

"What else can we do?" Teacher asked.

"The child sitting next to them should pat them on the shoulder and remind them to sit quietly."

"There is no need for everyone to shout, I will get up and make Akash sit next to me," said Abhishek.

"The main reason Akash and Akshay behaved like that was because they couldn't participate properly in the play with us," the Teacher said. "This problem probably wouldn't have occurred if they could have participated."

Pankaj said, "Yes teacher, they may have got angry when we laughed at them." "We should have helped them when they could not remember words," said Vidya.

"We have to play a game that everyone can take part in or we all need to help those who are finding it difficult to play the game, right?" the Teacher added.

The teacher read all the points written on the board through the discussion.

The measures leaning towards punishment will take Akshay-Akash further away from the group. It will further harm them, the teacher explained to everyone.

Akash and Akshay were also asked which option seemed right. Their faces lit up when they heard that everyone in the class was ready to help them. "We're not going to be mischievous anymore, teacher," said Akash. "I will sit next to Abhishek and listen to him," said Akshay.

"Next time we don't want to be angry with them, we want to include them in the group," Vidya declared. They all agreed.

"Tai, tell us beforehand which game you will be taking. We will prepare!" Akash said.

Abhishek took the responsibility to check if they were actually preparing for the game throughout the next fortnight. Towards the end of the class the Teacher reminded them all, "No one mentioned the qualities of Akash and Akshay in today's 'appreciation round'. Do we want to tell them something in the end?"

"Both of them are very honest. They told the truth."

"They are brave. They knew there would be discussion on their behavior and even then they attended the meeting." Opinions of this sort were expressed.

## Not Punishment but Reimbursement

Children often make mistakes. Sometimes someone's fault causes loss to that person and to others too. How to compensate for this loss in a positive way? How to correct this behavior in children? Let's understand this.

In terms of justice there is a need to compensate for the loss. But even if it is called compensation it is very close to punishment from the perspective of the children.

There can be three types of unruly behavior. In the first two cases it is better not to go in the direction of 'compensation'.

### 1) Behavior that will cause loss to the child.

For example, carelessly forgetting the lunchbox over and over again, not studying, etc. The natural consequences of such mistakes unless borne by children themselves, improvement may not be possible. It is okay to talk about it once in a while but it is not right to pester them with the same thing again and again. It will only be remembered well if left to them.

### 2) Behavior that puts the child at risk but she doesn't understand it yet.

For example, playing on the street. In this situation -

- Giving an idea of the consequences

- If they don't listen, don't allow them to do it.

But what if they did it when we weren't there? It is necessary to educate the children in this regard as it can be dangerous.

### 3) Behaviour that causes trouble to others; however, children do not understand or are not willing to understand this.

After using all the steps of positive discipline we need to decide the compensation. This should be done through discussion with that group and with the child. The following guiding principles can be kept in mind when determining the compensation.

- Compensation should be related to behavior.
- Must be respectful to all. Compensation should not include accusatory, insulting or hurtful statements. (Respectful)
- Compensation should be fair to those concerned. It should be proportionate to the mistake – neither too big nor so small that the mistake gets ignored. (Relevant)
- It should be decided by talking to the children. It is good if the child has chosen the compensation herself. (Revealed in Advance)
- Reimbursement should help in the development of the child.

## Rules drawn from discussions between children and Tai in the secondary school level group in the Khelghar:



### Rules for children

1. Children should arrive on time at Khelghar.
2. They should remove their footwear and keep them neatly on the stand. Children should not hide each other's footwear.
3. No swearing at each other, no fighting.
4. Put the item in its proper place after use.
5. Pay attention when Tai is teaching.
6. Children should tell Tai what they want without any inhibitions
7. No damaging of items, materials. If the damage is done it should be reimbursed by the concerned person.



### Rules for Tais

1. Tai must arrive at the Khelghar before the children.
2. If the rules are not followed she should not get angry but just point at the chart of the rules.
3. Tai should not insult children; she should not taunt them.
4. She has to determine the right place, to keep the objects.
5. Teach the subject well.
6. Design activities that children will enjoy.
7. She should not talk about the damage to children's parents.
8. She should keep the secrets revealed to her by the children safe.

Let's look at an example from Khelghar.

Once Tai found three-four dusters thrown into a tub of water. The sponge and the wooden handle had dislodged from each other. They were completely spoiled. Someone had done this on purpose. Tai was very angry at this attitude of deliberate destruction of Khelghar property. She also had a suspicion that three to four mischievous boys from eighth-ninth grade were responsible.

It was natural that this issue would figure in the Discussion Forum activity two days later. By now Tai had got control over her anger and had already started planning the steps towards working out a solution. She calmly expressed her feelings to the children and instead of asking 'who did this?' asked "Why someone may have done this?" The discussion revealed that three to four children in the group were very angry with Tai and Khelghar. Because of their unruly behaviour she was worried about allowing them to join a trip. And she had spoken about this in the last week which had angered these children.

The children had expressed their anger by throwing the dusters in water. Tai told the children the cost of the

dusters and the damage done. She expressed her unhappiness that the children had not expressed their anger at the right time and in the right way. Then she calmly listened to the children's expectations. She also explained her side to them.

She agreed to act on the expectations that seemed right. It was decided to take up a duster-making activity the next day. The children who had caused damage took up the task of collecting rags and cloth to make the duster. The children also agreed to bring it to Tai's notice immediately and directly if something bothered them. She also assured them that all the decisions regarding the children's activities would be taken with the consent of all the children.

'Positive discipline' is not a narrow concept to be used just for class control. 'Positive discipline' is essential so that children learn joyfully; so that children feel the urge to strive to achieve something; so that they participate enthusiastically in the teaching-learning process in the classroom. This is a journey towards a better relationship between a child and an adult, in fact, between any two individuals so as to make the world more humane.



**Towards a solution through a discussion with children**







## 5 Mediums of Learning at Khelghar

# Play Art and Dialogue

"The sensitive teacher, while valuing the child's work, is more concerned with the process than the product. The teacher who is anxious that children produce attractive but uniform pictures or craft items is likely to limit and hamper the child's spontaneous and natural urge for expression. Children's development follows different paces and styles. It is important for the teacher to recognize and respect the needs of particular children according to their temperaments, experiences and emotional and intellectual growth. It is a time for experimentation and not rigidity or an over-emphasis on skills. The adult's function at this stage is to provide space and materials for these activities and to be a responsive and sympathetic listener to the child's sharing."

Learning through ART- Jane Sahi and Roshan Sahi.

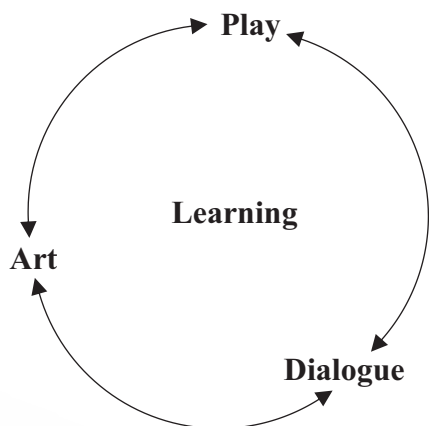


That children think about their surroundings with sensitivity, get space and opportunities to express their thoughts, explore alternatives, become self-motivated and capable of taking their own decisions while learning to take the responsibility for those decisions is the direction that Palakneeti Khelghar tirelessly pursues. We have realized from our experience that this pursuit can be effective if Tais work with children by adopting the means and the mediums that children genuinely enjoy, namely - Play, Art and Dialogue!

Activities related to play, expression through art and dialogue involve integration of body, mind and intellect. Children participate enthusiastically in these activities and engage in self-motivated learning. These mediums provide space to every child, thus setting them free and facilitating association of new learnings with pre-existing knowledge. Children and teachers both get the opportunity to break out of the hierarchical “Teachers teach, students learn” pattern of learning and start constructing knowledge on their own accord.

Unfortunately, play, art and dialogue are not given priority in the school syllabus. A common experience of all children is that adults generally restrict play, free engagement in art and open conversations.

Khelghar has given utmost priority to these three themes. Not just priority, but these themes are deemed as being central to the structure of Khelghar. Let us try to understand this vision.



For facilitating the 'development of understanding' that occurs through the integration of body, mind, and intellect

*\* Space- the word is used with wide connotation of freedom, enough time, opportunity and place.*



### **Play, Art, Dialogue, and the Aim of Khelghar**

If our aim is the development of thinking ability of children, the first and foremost checkpoint would be that children should willingly attend Khelghar. They should feel like participating in Khelghar's activities wholeheartedly. If this is to be achieved, then children need to experience the joy of learning. The environment of Khelghar should be such that it makes children feel interested in learning, ignites curiosity in their minds, and provides a free and open space where asking questions is encouraged. They should feel eager and motivated to seek new information and to find answers to their questions. If we succeed in creating such an environment, then the children will take initiative to plan and execute different projects at Khelghar. They will not only be able to study and understand their own circumstances but also become empowered to overcome the obstacles in their path with positivity and determination. They will endeavor to shape their current circumstances and eventually, their own future!

The goal that Khelghar aspires to is quite fascinating, but equally challenging. For that, first and foremost, we need to understand the 'child'.

## What do young children like?

### Age group 6-10 years

To understand the children of this age group we must seek answers to questions like “What do these children enjoy?”, “What engages them?” and “What do they want?”. Pondering on these questions while observing children of this age makes us realize that –



- Children of this age love to play! The words “Let’s play” immediately light up their eyes and they readily participate in play.
- They love to eat their favourite food.
- They love to wander freely. They love to collect things.
- Children of this age like to mingle and meddle in the activities with older children.

## What do adolescent children like?

### Age group 11-14 years

Adolescent children outgrow their childhood games and hence during this period children are attracted to adventure. They yearn to prove their mettle by undertaking various challenges. This is also the time when unrealistic ideas and notions propagated through the TV, movies and internet take hold of their mind.

Children of this age may or may not take responsibility for their decisions but nevertheless they wish to have freedom to take decisions.

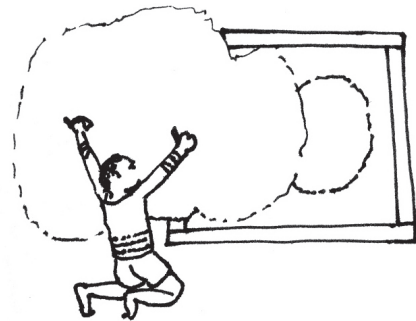
- These children love to be outdoors, they love outings. Outings provide an opportunity to test their nerve and courage. They are drawn to activities like trekking, exploring new places and meeting new people.

- The events like gatherings are a big hit with these children. The feeling that “I am performing for an audience; people are listening to me” makes them feel important and provides encouragement.
- Teenagers absolutely love chitchat. Friendly teasing, leg pulling, joking in a group is their preferred activity. Gossiping about those absent in the group is a favourite pastime! Chitchatting within a mixed gender group is especially enjoyable at this age.

## Why do children enjoy these activities?

### Spontaneity

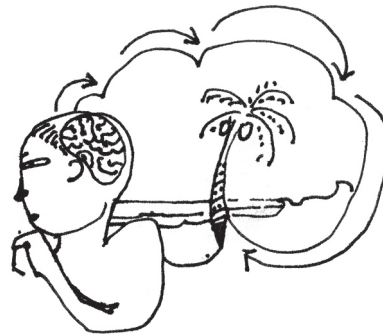
Children love to do these things because no one forces them to do it. Children are the happiest when they find the freedom to spontaneously “feel” and “do”. Playing and wandering provide, such a freedom. Children despise



being forced to act according to the decisions of adults. They seek cracks and opportunities within these adult-enforced structures and yearn to live life on their own terms.

### Integration of Body, Mind and intellect

Children are totally engrossed in activities like drawing, creating something from waste materials, cooking, gardening, decorating the blackboard in the classroom,



playing, acting etc. These activities provide them with the opportunity to integrate their body, mind and intellect effectively.



## Challenge and Curiosity

Children love to face challenges in games. They need to put in their best effort to overcome these challenges, which they happily and readily do.

For example, in team games the challenge is to work together to help your team win. There are similar challenges in solving puzzles and in adventure activities.

Novelty and uniqueness in the classroom activities help to retain their natural curiosity and provide essential challenges for children.

## Imagination

The activities in art and play provide opportunity to



imagine and ideate. It enables children to create something using their ideas and to formulate activities which are based on rules decided by them. This is an extremely creative process. Children fully get engaged in and are completely engrossed in these activities. Chess, skits, story creation are a few examples of such activities.

## Sensitivity

Seeing, touching, tasting, listening to something new provide children with a much-needed sensory challenge. For example, climbing trees, caring for animals, building sandcastles etc.

The things that children enjoy doing involve all these aspects and that is why they get engrossed doing such activities! Unknowingly, they also learn a lot through these activities!

## No Goals Please!

The activities that children love to engage in are not burdened by goals set by someone else for them to achieve.

They enjoy these activities because they are free from anxieties of meeting expectations. Traditional approach



Children at Khelghar painting a wall in 2014 Pune Binnale



to education has 'goals' set by the teacher for every activity, and this is where children start to lose interest. Let us take an example.

A group of 7-8 kids sets out to wander in the hills on a holiday. They roam around the hills, climb up the trees to pick berries and plunge into the waters in a deserted stone quarry - they have a wonderful time. This is how children spend days together playing with their friends during their vacations. Now imagine that this is a 'planned' and 'organized' school picnic. What does that lead to? Rules! Admonishment! Experience writing assignment after the picnic! Receiving an earful about their mistakes and wrongdoings! Quite obviously, children do not enjoy this organized picnic as much as they enjoy their free wanderings. Children start to despise school because someone else is constantly in control of everything that goes on. Despite all this, children like picnics as the rules and the restrictions are more relaxed here than in the usual classroom setting. School picnics are preferred over classroom learning, but nothing can beat the joy of unrestrained, free wanderings with friends.

### **No Restrictions Please!**

Children do not like rules and restrictions imposed by someone else. They keenly abide by the rules of the game when they themselves form the rules. If children are the active participants in formulating the rules they do not feel the need to rebel against those rules. Of course, it is not practical to have children form all the rules. Adults will need to make some rules for the children but if adults make it a point to explain the reasoning behind the rules children are less inclined to resent them.

### **Adult's Contribution to children's learning**

Children easily and naturally learn from their spontaneous activities. Adults responsible for nurturing children i.e., parents and teachers need to acknowledge the importance of this natural learning process and shape educational structures accordingly. Children learn a lot from play and communication with their peers. Adults also play an important role in the development of children. We should aspire to become their comrade, their friend in the process of 'knowledge construction' that starts from their experiences and culminates into 'understanding'.

Children have their own experiences, their own imagination and their own criteria for making choices. But it is essential that they reach a level of understanding by weighing the pros and cons of their choices. They need adults who can help them decide for themselves



what is good and what is bad. They need adults who can empower them to take ownership of their decisions. Children being young, are easily influenced by their surroundings. However, these surroundings are not always conducive for their growth. We live in a world that is market-oriented and views everything from a 'profit-making' perspective. Be it politics, media, or social and educational systems – all have profiteering interests. It is quite possible that children unwittingly become pawns in these ruthless markets. They run the risk of being easily attracted to shady and illegal ways of life. In such circumstances the onus is on adults to understand children despite their mistakes and incorrect choices. Adults need to become facilitators of change. Our task is to help our girls and boys to become aware of the realities of our society and to empower them to face the dangers and failures that might come their way. We do not want to lead them in any particular direction, rather we merely need to help them find their own direction.

So far, in the above discussion we have tried to understand what children like, what engages them and why. Now let us understand how we as Khelghar can put to practice the principles of spontaneity, sensitivity, openness, freedom, curiosity and the joy of hard work.

# Play

It is sheer joy to observe children engrossed in playing. They are completely involved in the play. All that matters to them at that point of time is their play.

Their faces are flushed with intense focus. Their supple bodies are full of verve and vitality. They are alert, not bothered by physical injury. They are prepared to do whatever it takes, to give it their best. They are not bound by restraints of time. It is mesmerizing to see their exhilaration when they achieve what they have set their minds to. Dialogue, teamwork, fierce arguments for fairness, ensuring that no one cheats, fighting for justice and making sure nobody is left behind – we experience all of these things when we observe children at play.

## What does play achieve?



Harmony between freedom and responsibility is easily achieved in play. Children fully utilize their individual potential when they are a part of a team. To participate or not in play is the child's choice. Every game has its own rules. Sometimes children may decide these rules together as a team but once they decide to play they must abide by those rules. The game cannot progress if players do not follow the rules. Any player who does not abide by the rules finds himself excluded from the game. No one can change rules arbitrarily. Every player must take responsibility to play the game based on the rules decided by the group and they easily do so because everybody wants to experience the joy of playing.

Play becomes joyful because of the challenges it poses, the excitement it offers, and the willingness it creates within the players to face unexpected situations.

Another fun aspect of play is its spontaneity! In play, the child takes decisions every minute and immediately acts on those decisions. Children have the presence of mind to do this because they are not burdened by the past and the future. Their minds are not shadowed by emotions. They are completely engrossed in the 'present' moment with their mind, body, and intellect.

Play challenges the abilities of children in so many ways, and yet







Children engrossed in the game 'Dog and bone' in Khelghar, on a hill near Nagpur organised by Indian Institute of Education.

children are always happy and willing to play. They love games like Kho-Kho, Hopscotch, Kabaddi etc. The 'Dog and the Bone' is another game that children enjoy.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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**Tai**

**Handkerchief**

8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
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This game requires players to take decisions without delay and act at a moment's notice. This is particularly challenging for the body, mind and intellect. One cannot afford to be lax. It keeps the players on their toes. This makes the game very enjoyable for children and adults alike.

The other advantage of the game is that it can be played in

a small space, even in the classroom. It can be played in a group of 10 to 30 participants.

In this game, children stand in two groups facing each other on either side of a line drawn by Tai. Tai assigns a number to every child and keeps a handkerchief in the centre. She calls out a number, say '2', and then children from both the groups who are assigned the number '2' run to the centre and try to snatch the handkerchief. The child who snatches the handkerchief and returns to her position, wins. If the child who carries the handkerchief is tagged by the number '2' from the other group before reaching his place, he loses the round. The child who is more alert, more agile and quicker, wins the round.

Tai keeps score for both the teams on the blackboard. Children compete with fervour to score more points for their team. Both teams cheer for their players. This creates excitement and a charged atmosphere. If both the players reach the handkerchief at the same time, they devise tricks and strategies to fool their opponent and snatch the handkerchief right from under his nose. The rival team tries to distract them. Even if only two players are playing at a given time both the teams are fully

involved in the game. Everybody ensures that the rules of the game are strictly followed. It is recommended that teams include both boys and girls so that children learn to appreciate mutual differences and develop respect for each other.

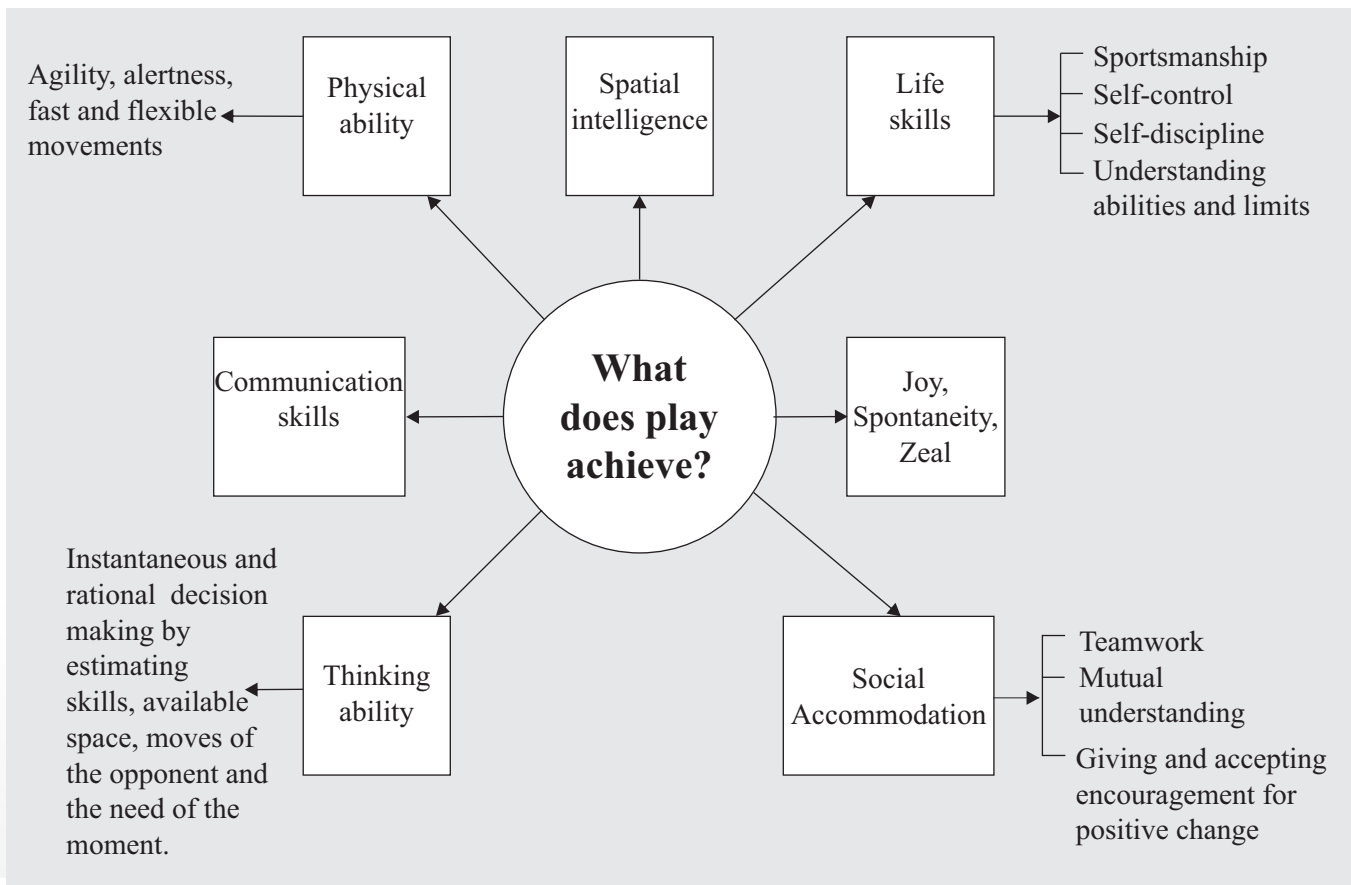
Both teams sit for a round of discussion with Tai after the winning team is cheered. A discussion on what could have helped the team win ensues. Sometimes children protest the disparity between teams and make Tai restructure the teams. The more the teams are at par with each other with respect to the age, gender distribution and skills of the players, the better the game is relished. Children might demand that weaker players be taken off their teams. In such situations Tai calls upon other players in the team to help their weaker teammates. Sometimes the children accept this and stronger players train the weaker ones in the team. They discuss and devise strategies like positioning faster players towards the ends of the line (numbers 1 or 7), farther from the handkerchief and placing weaker players at numbers 4 or 5 towards the center of the line nearer to the handkerchief.

Sometimes children display sportsmanship by accepting the result of the game and discussing the strengths and skills of the better players. They also discuss what they can do to develop such capacities within themselves.

All this happens joyfully, spontaneously and naturally. There is hardly any “teaching” involved in it. Everybody gets a fair chance and encouragement to do better.

### What is achieved through play in early childhood?

Adults who assume responsibility for nurturing and educating children need to understand the process of child development in detail. Babies tirelessly try to understand each object and every person in their surroundings. Their exploration becomes more concrete and able after every milestone of physical development like rolling over, crawling or walking. Babies try to understand objects by holding, pulling, banging, sucking, chewing, and throwing them. They keep playing with an object in as many ways as they can think of. While playing they intuitively begin to understand the characteristics of the object. E.g., round things roll, anklets make a “chum chum” sound when we move our





## Developmental milestones achieved through play

- 'Play' is synonymous to 'Learning' during early childhood. The child plays with every object by holding, banging and testing and thus creates an understanding about it. Slowly the child starts to play with toys. 3-5 years is the pre primary education age group. Children of this age play in a group using themes e.g., Role play of house, school etc. Children learn cooperation and self-control while creating and following rules of their play and along with this activity their ability of abstract thinking also develops.
- In the next stage children become mobile. They engage in outdoor sports and games. They learn social adjustment through playing together, accommodating and communicating with each other. Physical games strengthen muscles and improve blood circulation to the brain. This creates enthusiasm and zeal. Stress-busting hormones are released and overall happiness increases.
- Challenges in play increase after the age of 9-10 years. Play becomes competitive. Rules become stricter and “winning” becomes important. Typically, only those children who have acquired the skills and technique needed for the game engage in it, others opt out.

Competition in games also leads to negative emotions like failure, jealousy, antagonism, animosity, and vengeance. It is the responsibility of Tai to avoid such negative emotions and to lead the children in a positive direction that nurtures team spirit, leadership, pursuit of excellence.

feet etc. At every stage of cognitive development children's play also changes. They confer names and forms to objects based on their imagination. E.g., A stick becomes a horse, a small house materializes under the table and so on. In such imaginary games children enact many roles, deliver appropriate dialogues and sometimes they even fight in play! This happens naturally through their observations of surroundings. Play not only develops their motor skills but also their ability for abstract thinking.

Children start attending formal preschool at the age of three years. Adult-controlled educational processes are added to the child's natural, intuitive and spontaneous learning process. Experts stress the need for child educators to follow the course of natural learning process of the child.

For children studying in second and third grades Tais often introduce new subjects through play. In fact, play, art, and academic subjects are closely intertwined.

One day, Tai brought some cotton and distributed it in the class. Children started tossing their cotton in the air. Tai suggested a game of making small flat disks with cotton and blowing them up in the air without letting them fall.

Children loved this game. Children also played the game in groups by setting the time. After the game Tai suggested to do drawings using the cotton. Children pasted the cotton disks as clouds in their drawings. They devised paint brushes by wrapping the cotton on small sticks. The same cotton disks turned into green foliage and blue water in their drawings. A child even pasted it as an old woman's hair! One drawing had a boy riding a cotton cloud on an adventurous journey. Another boy stuck cotton in his hair and on his chin and became an old man. Not long after this experience a boy brought a pod of the silk-cotton tree to the class. Silky strands of cotton breezing around the classroom and their soft touch – we still remember the energy it brought to the class that day.

With children of third and fourth grades after drawing, arranging and discussing their pictures Tai talked about how cotton is grown. She had brought a cotton pod to the class to initiate a discussion about the entire process from deseeding the cotton, spinning and making clothes from it. The discussion continued to the uses of cotton and the reasons for using cotton clothes. Children performed actual experiments and explored the characteristic of cotton that absorbs water and sweat.

## Let us ensure this -

### Tai/Dadas should be vigilant about the following while conducting games with children -

- Tai/Dadas should also participate in play along with the children. Playing along with children and having fun together is a great opportunity to be friends with them.
- No one should dictate in play. The leader explains the game, demonstrates it once and starts the game. Games should be learnt only through playing!
- Physical and emotional security is extremely important during play. If that is being adversely affected in any manner Tai/Dada should intervene immediately.
- Tai/Dada should ensure that no child feels left out or is disheartened in the game. They should make it a point to convey to the children that it is the responsibility of the entire group to make every child feel included.
- Games which eliminate participants to declare a single winner should be modified to make them more inclusive.

For example, children sit in a circle and recite numbers turn by turn. If the number is a multiple of 3 and 5, the child claps his hands without saying the number aloud. Typically, in this game the child who misses to clap is eliminated from the game. This continues till all, but one player is eliminated and the last one is declared to be the winner. This game can be easily modified in the following manner to make it a lot of fun for all participants. If a child misses to clap the other children shout “Fight!! You can do it!” as encouragement and the game restarts from this child. If a child persistently fails to clap the right numbers, he receives help from others in the group.

**Reference: Play for peace**

### Types of games -

- Indoor and outdoor games
- Traditional games
- Games related to textbook lessons and concepts
- Age-appropriate games

Khelghar may not have enough space and resources for games. Hence it is necessary to select games that can be played even in the classroom. Hopscotch, Kabaddi, Standing Kho-Kho, Circular Kho-Kho, Chain, Sand or Stone, Dog and the Bone are some games that require hardly any material and can be easily played in a classroom of size 20' x 20' by clearing the space.

'7 Up' is another game that children adore. Here is how it is played.

In this game children sit or stand in a circle. A player calls out '1' to start the game.

If the player lifts his left hand and takes it across his chest to his right shoulder the participant to his right calls out '2', and if he lifts his right hand and takes it across his chest to his left shoulder the participant to his left calls out '2'.

Every child while calling out the next number gets the opportunity to decide whether the counting should proceed in a clockwise or in an anticlockwise direction and hence everybody needs to be very alert in the game. The child who gets the turn to call out number '7' puts a hand on his head and says, '7 Up'. If he puts his right hand on his head, the participant to his left continues the counting from 1 and if he puts his left hand on his head, the participant to his right continues the game.

The child who is not attentive enough to act appropriately at the right time will make a mistake. Instead of eliminating that child from the game, he should be given the opportunity to restart the game. The group can be challenged to complete three rounds of the game within the shortest possible time without making any mistake. In a group-challenge children help each other trying to prevent other's mistakes and work together as a team.

'Musical chairs' is also a favourite game of children and adults alike. If enough chairs are not available we can divide the children into two groups. Children from one group stand in a line one behind the other. Odd numbered children put their right hand on their waist, even

Is play no longer a part of our adult life? Adults do play games such as tennis, badminton and billiards but only in the elite circles. For the common man play ends at a certain stage in life. We miss out on this big source of happiness.

Teachers have the opportunity to overcome this!

Play with abandon with the children! Just remember – not to try to teach anything in play. Hand over the control to the children. Our experience is that children accommodate adults very easily. They try to help adults to prevent any injury. Physical and emotional safety of children is the prime responsibility of teachers. Instead of making rules too strict as a preventive measure to avoid untoward incidents, let us trust children, communicate with them and play with them. We can take over the control if the need arises.

Playing with children is a rare opportunity for adults to let their hair down. It provides freedom to shed the burden of responsibilities at least for some time and have fun.

Play has the power to change the mood of the class in the wink of an eye. Everybody gets caught up in the enthusiasm and feels refreshed.

numbered children put their left hand on their waist. The music starts and the other group runs in circles around this line. When the music stops the children from the running group link arms with the children ahead in the line.

There are many indoor games like Clay modeling, Carrom, Uno, Challas Aath, Snakes and Ladders and other board games. Thought-provoking games like Chinese puzzle, Bramha's tower, Brainvita are also important. Playing cards has unfortunately gained disrepute but in fact card games help the development of numerical skills and logical thinking. Please check pg. 298 in this book for the chapter 'Mathematical Harmony' for further reference.

Many traditional Maharashtrian games like Fugdi, Jhimma, Bas-Fugdi etc. are long forgotten now. We need to bring these fun games back to the classroom. Though these games are traditionally thought to be girls' games, they in fact require tremendous agility and flexibility and are beneficial for all. If given proper encouragement boys can also have fun with these games.

Traditional boys' games like Hopscotch, Atya-Patya, swinging on banyan roots have been sidelined in favour of cricket. Playing with a ball is generally forbidden in the class to avoid damage to the glass windows of the classroom. Instead of keeping the ball out of the classroom can we not keep the glass windows out?

For younger children games like 'Simon Says', 'Leader-Leader', Statue, 'Chinese Whispers', 'Tipi Tipi Tip Top' and role play games like Kitchen, School are quite

popular. Children invent many other games as well and teach them to their teachers.

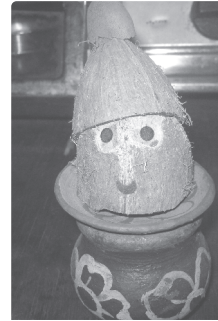
Games that relate to curricular lessons are also important. These games are great for introducing the lesson and nudging the children to start thinking in the direction of the concept at hand.

Crosswords, Word-Antakshari, Name-Place-Animal-Thing, 20 questions, Dumb Charades are some examples of language games that many of us have played in our childhood. There are numerous number games as well. Details about these can be found in the chapters for Language and Math.

It needs to be understood that there is a difference between play and activity. For example, the activity where children think of many words related to a given topic and the teacher writes them on the blackboard is called 'mind-mapping'. This is an educational activity. It can be made enjoyable like play but the challenge and the fun factor that play provides is missing in these activities. Play automatically develops many learning abilities. However developing those abilities is not its goal.

Play is the most important medium among play, art and dialogue and it is the children's favourite medium. The balance of joy, learning, and discipline is wonderfully achieved in play. Play needs to be supplemented with art and dialogue. Such a coordination not only enhances play but also provides valuable help for capability and skill development.

“The purpose of art education is not only to create artists but to develop an insight into art and an artistic awareness. This does not require art to be taught as a separate subject. It is more appropriate that art be included in the pedagogy of every subject, in day-to-day activities of the school and in annual functions.”  
 – Nandlal Bose



“Impossible! I cannot draw at all!”

“I have never been involved in art, sculpture etc. ever in my life before.”

“This is the first time that I am trying my hand at drawing since childhood. It's not bad, is it?”

“Art is only for artists. It is not for commoners like us.”

These reactions by participants of Palakneeti Khelghar Training Workshops are quite explicit. Some adults have a negative outlook towards art as they have not experienced the joy that art can provide. How can these adults create opportunities of expression for children?

The perceptions noted above are the main reason why art has been omitted from the life of the common man. We need to reexamine the truth behind the perception that only artists can express through the medium of art and commoners like us can at most appreciate their art. To achieve it we need to understand the concepts of art, skill, expression and creativity in more detail.

## Art and Skill

In a workshop conducted at Sita School near Bengaluru, Ms. Jane Sahi defined art very simply as, “Art helps us create a bridge between what is and what you feel in your mind.”

We often face an array of joyful, sad, unsettling, exciting and depressing experiences. These experiences have an impact on our mind. They create ripples of emotions and thoughts. Sometimes our feelings and thoughts are quite hazy. It can be quite complex at times and we ourselves do not have clarity about it.

'Expression' is the manifestation of what is understood or thought to be understood.

Since childhood we are used to articulating our thoughts using words that is why we are more comfortable with that medium. But there are many more mediums such as body language, paintings, sculptures, music and dance, through which we can express our feelings, thoughts and

Clay work, origami, songs, drama are some of the mediums through which we explore art at Khelghar. This chapter, however focuses mainly on activities related to drawing and painting. You can read about language-related creative activities in the Volume. Role play, songs, prayers, etc are included in the chapter 'Some Valuable tips.' Due to some limitation we have not been able to include dance and music in this chapter.



views. If one wants to express through any medium effectively one needs to master the technique of that medium. This technique is nothing but 'skill'. Expression is still possible without skill because skill is not art. Art is born out of ardent consciousness. It expects honesty and self-reflection, i.e., truthful expression of emotions.

While learning the 'skill' is important but it is vital that spontaneity and flexibility are not lost in the process. Else there will be no 'Art' left.

## **Creativity**

Jane Sahi on Creativity – “Art and creativity are closely related. Creativity needs peace and tranquility so that you can listen to your inner voice. Your emotions will be awakened. In this state of awakening your consciousness becomes fluid and experiences easily permeate your mind. You can then become 'one' with your experience. What manifests after is creativity.”

Every person is born with creativity, appreciation of beauty, imagination and a yearning for self-expression. These qualities take a back-seat if appropriate opportunities for their development are not available while growing up. That is why many people assume that creativity is not their cup of tea. People who are missing creativity in their life lead a dry and run-of-the-mill existence. The possibilities of creating joy in their life become rare. It also creates a big hurdle in the process of acquisition of knowledge. Let us explore how.

## **Significance of Art in the process of education**

We have explored the abstract process of learning in the chapter 'How do we learn.' We are continuously exposed to experiences like reading, observation, listening and doing. We employ our memory, emotions, perceptions, influences and preexisting knowledge to make sense of these experiences. This helps us analyze the information. We make decisions and take actions accordingly.

We feel every experience through our senses and give meaning to those experiences through our thought process. If we are receptive, we are able to feel emotions and sensations with great intensity. We can think honestly about them. This increases the impact of the experience. Our learning thrives and becomes more

effective. 'Art' enthuses, excites and sharpens our senses. Understanding is formed through the integration of the body, the mind and the intellect. The more conscious and sincere our efforts are the sharper our understanding will be.

That is why the meaning of art is not restricted to creating artwork. We think every moment in our life. The more honest and spontaneous our thoughts, the better we can understand ourselves and our surroundings. Our 'being' becomes artistic.

We innovate at work, we find solutions, we explore new paths – all this is creativity! Understanding, empathy and respect in human relations is art - the art of extending and receiving love! Learning new things, ideating, establishing connections with others, finding the strength to stand up against injustice - all these are manifestations of creativity. Art is not only an emotion; it is vitality, it is the ability to discern with wisdom. We realize and experience art through our body, mind and intellect. After understanding the importance of art and creativity in our life and learning, one can see that 'Art' is an indispensable medium of learning at Khelghar.

## **From Play to Art**

Art is a part of play for young children. It is also called “constructive play”. Not only activities like drawing, clay work and collage but activities such as creating structures and patterns with blocks, straws or beads and role playing of house, school that are generally classified as 'play', are art as well. Spontaneity, fluidity, concentration, engrossment, being ready for hard work, not having a specific goal in mind are the qualities of play which are applicable to art activities as well. The child's brain develops with age. Abstract thinking, imagination and memory develops. Children start to correlate thoughts about the past, present and the future. 'Art' is an activity-based approach of learning and communication for growing children. It is the responsibility of Tai/Dada provide opportunities for experiences that enable children to express their emotions, explore ideas, note observations and handle various materials and resources. Activities like drawing, painting and craft are great opportunities for children to develop muscle control as well as hand-eye coordination. The abstract process of

## Art, Development and Living

There are very few opportunities in schools and colleges for children to explore themselves and construct knowledge. Incorrect attitudes such as - “Copy what is written on the blackboard”, “Do as I say”, “Only those answers that use the textbook language are correct” - deprive children of the opportunity to think on their own. Their desire to think gradually diminishes. Thinking becomes a weary task and they start to avoid it. Thus the process of converting information into knowledge becomes sporadic.

A competitive environment does not provide the leisure or opportunity of free thinking. Hence, children and adults alike are slowly being distanced from creativity. Creativity is being uprooted from our work, our relations, even from our conscience. In a way, it is our freedom of thought that is being taken away. People who slog without any complaint within a given boundry and set of rules are beneficial for the system. The strict compartmentalization induced by our educational system which is a product of our social system is responsible for distancing the common man from art.

Subjects like art which motivate independent thinking need to be given importance in the curriculum. We should understand the need to create an environment that encourages self expression.

If we feel that the existing system has certain flaws we need to cultivate new moralities and thoughts, connect them and implement them in practice. Sowing the seeds of creativity within ourselves as well as among children and nurturing them is of utmost importance.

Initiatives like Khelghar that are engaged in social reform cannot proceed further without understanding the importance of art.

**- Based on the article by Manish Jain**

making sense of their experiences begins while acquiring the skill necessary to handle various types of materials.

Innovation is a natural outcome of creativity but that does not imply that children should innovate all the time. Drawings and actions of children are an expression of their thoughts and emotions. The child might not be able to accurately express herself every time but the required space and opportunity to do so should be made available at Khelghar. The child should not be pressured to draw neat and accurate pictures but instead, should be encouraged to work with passion, focus, and concentration. Instead of criticizing their drawings, adults should accept them with sensitivity and respect their expression.

In this chapter, you will find many examples of art activities that you can conduct with children.

The book 'Learning through Art' by Jane Sahi lists numerous activities that can be conducted with children.

Here is an example of an activity based on 'shapes' from this book which was conducted with children of grades third and fourth at Khelghar.

Tai drew a picture using various geometric shapes on the blackboard. She asked the children to find the shapes hidden in the drawing. Children pointed out circles, triangles and rectangles. Tai added to their vocabulary by showing them other shapes such as points, filled circles, equilateral, isosceles and scalene triangles, squares, quadrilaterals and so on.

**While exploring creativity with children –**

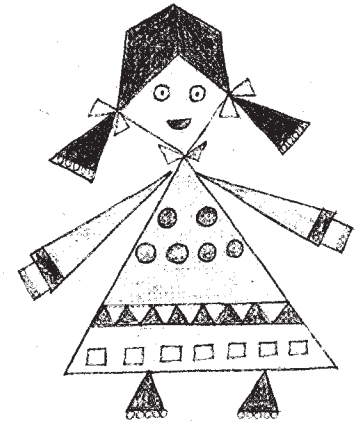
- Firstly, children need quiet, uninterrupted, and free time for creativity.
- Secondly, children might find it difficult to let their imaginations run free on a blank mental canvas. An idea that triggers creative activity can be a valuable starting point.
- Thirdly, they should have the opportunity to share their experience of the process with others.

**Jane Sahi**

- Palakneeti Diwali  
Edition 2006



Then Tai asked the children to locate those shapes in the classroom. Children started to look around. Tai made a list of the shapes they found on the board. The next challenge was to find these shapes on their bodies. Children found many circular shapes such as the face, eyes, nostrils, opening of the ear, mouth and the navel. They found very few triangles though.



As the next step, Tai asked the children to compose shapes using their bodies. Children first made shapes with their own body. Then with two, three, four children together in sitting, standing, lying down positions they made circles, the figure of 8, a snake and many such fun compositions. Many games evolved as they added pace and rhythm to the compositions.

Later, children were told to use shapes to compose patterns on a paper or slate. For example -

○, =  
•, |  
△, ▽, ○

These shapes lend themselves beautifully to border designs and other compositions. Children created many such drawings and even put up an exhibition. They were encouraged to talk about their work. Other children and Tai also talked about what they understood about the child and her drawing. Children were engrossed in this activity for over two hours.





## Benefits of Art for the teacher

The teacher can conduct art activities for children only if she herself has experienced the magic of art. Art is a valuable aspect of our life, more so for the teacher.

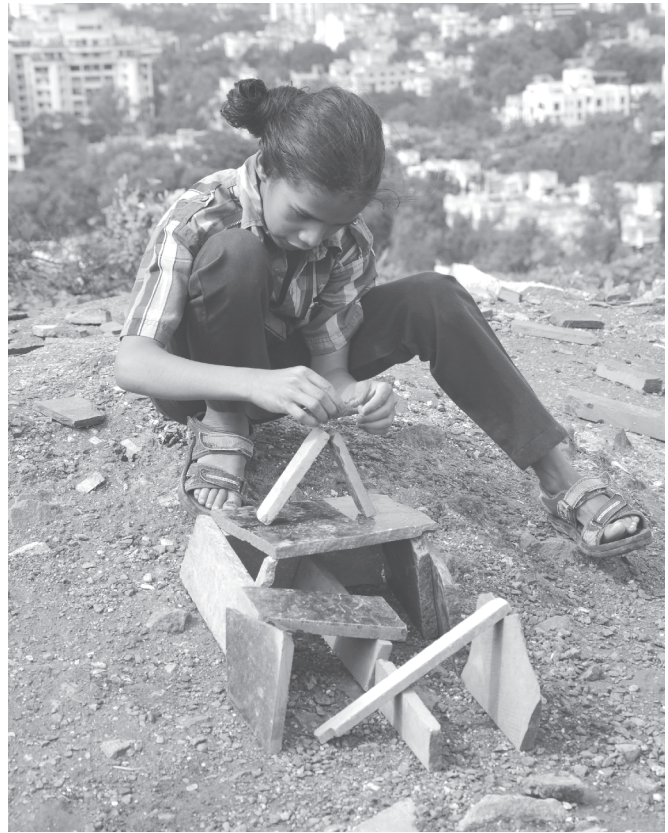
### Benefits of arts for the teacher are threefold.

- For self-expression, understanding, and development
- For understanding the child
- For making the classroom joyful and interesting.

### For this, the teacher needs to be able to do the following

- thinking of novel child-centric ideas
- proactively modifying the lesson plan based on children's inclination
- changing the direction of the lesson plan based on children's feedback and questions adhering to the content of the lesson plan
- dispelling boredom from the classroom
- conversing freely with children about her own experiences, emotions and thoughts

In order to achieve this, the teacher firstly needs to find the space to have a dialogue with herself. She needs to be in a quiet and stress-free environment. Adults are their own caregivers. They should create such a space for themselves at their workspace. They should cultivate the desire and the patience to do so.



Making compositions with pieces of tiles.

### While participating with children...

It is necessary to become calm and quiet in order to understand what one feels or wants to express. Children need help from Tai for this. An idea that is interesting and catches their attention can be a great way to start an activity. Here are a few examples of activities conducted with children from fifth to eighth grades.

- Tai was well prepared for the art activity before the children arrived.

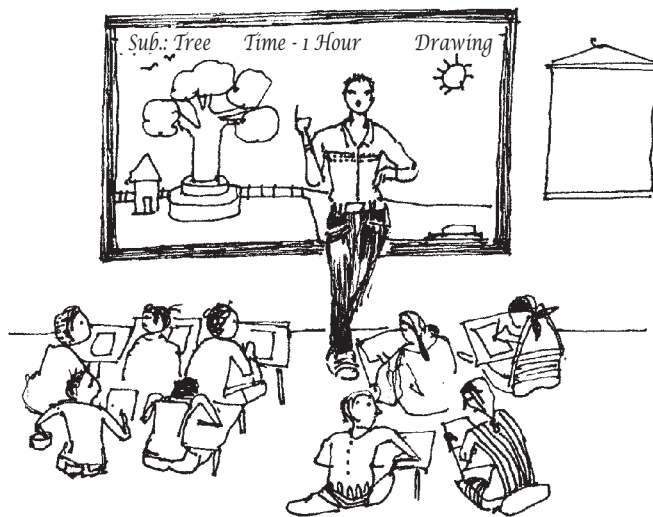
Newspapers were spread out at the center of the room. Bowls containing red, blue, green, and yellow Holi colours, mixed with water, were placed on them. Art materials like brushes, water, and papers were kept ready. Tai had already started to paint. As children started trickling into the room, they became curious about what Tai was doing. They too wanted to participate. They started asking for pencils and erasers. "Today we are going to draw directly with paint!" Tai told them. She drew her next picture without even using a brush! She dipped her fingers into the wet paint and drew directly with her fingers. There were some picture books kept

## What should be Tai/Dada's approach while 'participating in art activities' with children?

### The traditional / typical approach would be something like this –

The teacher wants to conduct a lesson about drawing a tree.

Each child has a plain piece of paper and a pencil. The teacher draws a picture of a banyan tree on the board and asks the children to identify it. The children are then told to copy it. The teacher goes around the classroom and looks at the children's work. Some children are praised. The teacher points out where other children have made mistakes and instructs them to erase and redraw portions of their pictures. A few children are asked to start again. The class ends when the bell rings. The teacher collects the drawings. There is no clear plan about what to do with the collected drawings. Later the drawings are graded for neatness and accuracy.



### Creative Tai/Dadas at Khelghar conduct the same activity in the following manner –

Tai starts a dialogue with the children - "I would like to show you something", she says. She accompanies them outdoors and they stop by a tree. She encourages them to observe the shape of the tree from a distance. Then they look closely at the branches, the trunk, the leaves, and the flowers. They touch the tree. Tai asks them whether they have seen this type of a tree before. "On the way to school", "Near the temple where we play" children recall. After further discussion about their memories and observations of the banyan tree, once children have created an image in their mind they go back to the classroom to draw and color a picture of the banyan tree.

Tai allows some time for the children to work on their drawings and then goes around the class looking at

their drawings carefully. She may ask questions or offer suggestions that help children to visualize the picture in their mind. She consciously refrains from giving instructions on 'improving' the pictures. Instead, she might ask, "Were all the fruits of the same color?", "How is the shape of this tree different from that of a peepal tree?" or "Did you notice any animals or birds near the tree?" Art class is typically the last lesson of the day. After time-up some children ask if they can continue to draw their pictures. Some want to take the drawings home to complete them. Some children have already completed. The next day children paste their pictures on their notebooks and show them to each other and to Tai. It is easy to note the difference between these two approaches.





handy. Children who were not sure about what to draw started to browse through these books. Tai asked the newcomers to take their art material and start drawing without disturbing others. After the paintings were done, activities like exhibiting the pictures, discussions on them, cleaning and tidying up the room and putting the art materials neatly in place were enthusiastically completed.

- It was around Rangpanchami time and children wanted to celebrate the festival at Khelghar. Tai was reluctant to celebrate it in the traditional manner, which was not practically feasible in the classroom. Tai presented an idea – “How about we paint on each other instead?” Children loved the idea of bodypainting. They gathered material such as food colours, Holi colours, palettes and brushes and started working in pairs. Children brought their imagination to life through paintings of leopards, tigers, cheetahs, peacock feathers and more. Some girls decided to work as a team to paint their friend. They wanted to portray her as a “Vanadevata”, i.e. the “Forest Goddess”. They used peacock feathers, leaves, flowers and clothes made of paper in addition to colours. The tigers, cheetahs, parrots, and peacocks were incredibly pleased with their appearance. They marched home to show their new 'avatar' to their parents.
- One day, Tai brought varied items such as a sieve, piece of bajra glass, gunny bags and a Chataai to the

class. She also kept thick lead pencils and different types of papers such as transparent tracing paper, smooth marble paper, and thick card sheets ready. The experiments began as soon as children entered the classroom. Texture of a material can be printed on paper by placing the paper on the material and rubbing it with a pencil. Children started experimenting. They collected samples of textures from the wall, the tiles on the floor, the cushions, Tai's purse, the window net and so on.

Then they made a collage using the texture samples they had collected. They added embellishments like seeds, pieces of ribbons, sticks and dried leaves to create wonderfully creative compositions.

- It was a rainy day with an overcast sky. The air was stuffy. Children did not want to be indoors. They went to the terrace. Tai asked them to observe the trees, the sky and the sunlight closely. A discussion followed. Soon a cold wind bringing tiny droplets of rain started to blow. It soon began to rain. The sky, the trees and the light suddenly transformed! “Let us be quiet and experience this only with our eyes, ears, and through our skin” Tai suggested. Children understood from Tai's demeanour that this was going to be a different experience. They were trying to feel the experience in the way Tai was feeling it. After returning to the classroom children came up with the idea of drawing a picture of the rain. The rain had literally and metaphorically drenched



**Face painting activity at Khelghar on Rangpanchami (Festival of colours)**



them. Pictures materialized easily on the paper.

- It was a bright sunny day in April. Children reached Khelghar around 3 pm, thoroughly exhausted by the heat. They were not in a mood to do anything. Tai started to narrate the story of 'Van Gogh', the famous artist.

This artist lived in a cold region. He was fascinated by sunlight and so he migrated to the sunny parts of Arlesia to paint pictures of the sunlight. He painted the fields, the sky, the trees, the houses - all basking in the bright sunlight. He was so engrossed in his painting that he did not even realize that he was not wearing a cap! He was bewitched by the bright yellow sunlight. "Do you want to see those paintings?" Tai asked the children.

They searched the internet to find Van Gogh's paintings. The colour strokes, their momentum was mesmerizing. Tai encouraged the children to observe how 'formless' things like the sunlight, the wind and the sky were depicted in the paintings. Children started to feel the urge to paint.

Dialogue is important to understand children's expressions. It facilitates an understanding of the abstraction in the expression. Sometimes, a child engrossed in art might feel reluctant to engage in dialogue. Paintings, sculptures and compositions are in fact alternatives to verbal expression.

The content expressed by these mediums reaches the heart. It is not always necessary to define it using words.

We have given examples of activities for children using the medium of 'painting'. It is possible to use different mediums of expression such as words, acting and music.

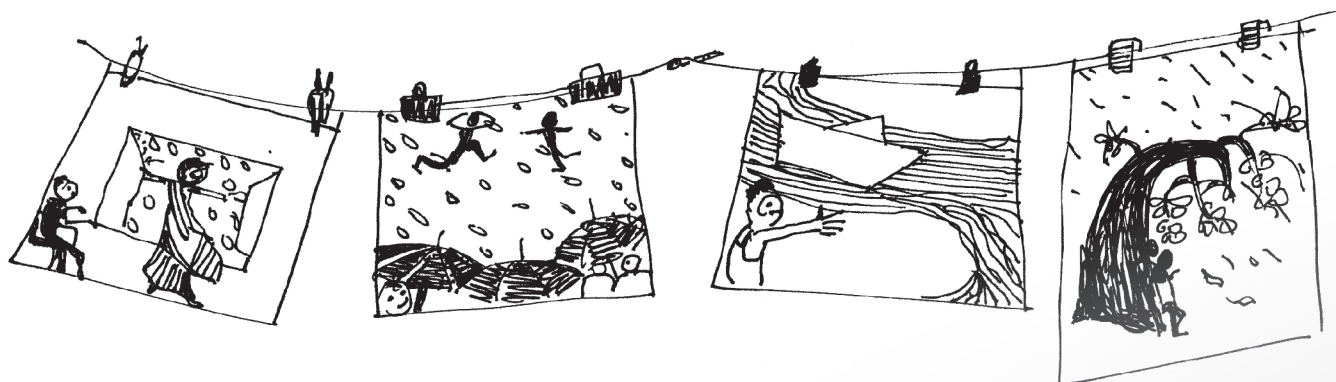
## What can be done for art education in schools?

The first and the foremost need of art education is the ability to view nature and artistic things with empathy and to be in their close proximity. This can be achieved in schools through the following ways –

1. Display paintings and sculptures in the corridors, classrooms and libraries. The artworks can be periodically changed.
2. Make books on art accessible to children.
3. Provide the opportunity of experiencing notable artwork from all over the world through movies and documentaries.
4. Organize visits to museums and art galleries.
5. Organize nature trips and celebrate festivals that bring children closer to nature.

Once children create a bond with nature, their creative interest will never dry up. These activities will help children develop an artistic attitude. They will learn to appreciate and respect art.

There is a detailed analysis of creative writing in the section on Language. Tai/Dadas should experience art along with children and accompany them in their artistic explorations.



## What should Tai /Dada keep in mind while conducting art activities

- Are children encouraged to do their own work and not copy or imitate others?
- Are various mediums like words, drawings, clay work, origami etc. being explored for art expression?
- Are children given time and flexibility to finish their work?
- Are children being helped to be more aware of and notice things in their environment?
- Are children encouraged to talk about their work?
- Are children encouraged to experiment with a variety of materials?
- Do the children have freedom, at least in the framework of Khelghar?
- Is a situation created whereby all children can participate?
- Are boys and girls given equal opportunities to participate in the activities?
- Are there alternatives available if a child feels bored?
- Is our communication with children constructive, respectful and supportive?
- Is there a display area in the classroom or school?
- Are all the children included in displays of their work in the course of the year?
- Does the children's work link and connect with their experience at home, the community and the school?
- Is the material required for these activities inexpensive and easily available? Is it being used economically?

-'Learning through Art' by Jane Sahi

## Making compositions with pieces of tiles





Many times our thoughts become clear only after expressing them verbally.

We have experienced that our thoughts start to untangle when we express them through speech. Speech is quite important in every aspect of life. However, 'speech' and 'dialogue' are not the same. "Speech" is the primary tool used in learning. Learning becomes concrete through speech.

## The difference between Speech and Dialogue

Why do people speak in their day-to-day life?

- To communicate – enquire, gather information, ask for help
- To instruct – message, get work done, teach
- To express – articulate one's feelings
- To describe – communicate about self, one's experience and incidents
- To take collective decisions
- To demand and to expect
- To state our opinion, ask for justice
- To make others do as we say
- To chitchat for entertainment

These are the various reasons why we speak. Speech can be natural, casual or deliberate. Sometimes the conversation between two people clearly displays the

hierarchical nature of their relationship and sometimes it is on equal terms.

A circle of communication is completed when one person speaks, the other person listens carefully, understands what is being said and responds to it. This kind of communication can be quite matter-of-fact. 'Dialogue' goes a step further to require an exchange between people. It includes listening as well as speaking; not only listening to the spoken word but also understanding the expression behind. Dialogue begins when a person understands the expression intended in the spoken word and shares her thoughts about it. When the dialogue between two people becomes honest, meaningful and leads to understanding, we say that their 'frequencies match' or that they have a 'heart-to-heart' communication.

Let us understand this in detail.

Our mind is in a constant state of 'thinking'. This process is quite complex and often confusing. Two things are quite important. Transformation from the state of 'confusion' to a state of 'understanding'. First, self-dialogue and secondly, being able to communicate our understanding to others. Communicating with others helps us realize what we have really understood. Abstract thoughts and ideas become clear and concrete when put into words. Even if we are not able to express our thoughts in entirety at least a part gets expressed and clarified.

We are no longer alone in this process. Listening to our expression is a new experience for our listener. Our words reach the listener's heart. The listener understands





our expression using the framework of her memory and context and in turn expresses her feelings and thoughts. Her expression further guides our thought process. When all participants in the conversation take forward, search and evaluate their thought process together, they are said to be engaged in a 'conversation'.

## Self-dialogue



We see, read, experience and listen. Establishing dialogue means expressing our thoughts verbally through writing or through the medium of art. Self-dialogue can be initiated by books, experiences and even images. Many times thoughts appear in our mind without any external stimulus. Happenings around us, incidents in the present and in the past can trigger something in the mind. This is 'self-dialogue'. The more enriched and honest the self-dialogue is, the more effective would be our dialogue with others.



**From dialogue to friendship**

## Dialogue for knowledge-creation

“We are mulling about a particular topic, exploring it through self-study, visualizing related images, ideas and thoughts but we do not have enough clarity about it. With this frame of mind we sit down for a discussion with our group. Everybody in the group puts forth her opinion and thoughts formed through her individual experiences and study of the topic. We might not agree with all that is stated. Different opinions, points-of-view are being evaluated. The discussion helps us realize new dimensions of the topic. Active participation from all the group members helps us get clarity on new ideas and aspects. Everybody is helping one another to reach a higher level of understanding. Knowledge is being constructed.” – this is dialogue in its true sense!

Reaching this stage requires a lot of work. The chapter on 'Discussion Forum' describes the procedure for this. Dialogue is uniquely important in the learning process. True learning is not possible without dialogue.

## Obstacles in dialogue

This process of having a dialogue with the self or with others, though quite fascinating, is not as easy as it seems to be. There are many obstacles in this process. Many invisible walls separate people in the social, political and domestic framework that we operate in. Be it any environment, our home, office, schools, colleges, shops, we are forced to realize that we are either more privileged or less privileged than others. This deters us from speaking our mind. This distance between people causes hurdles in the process of dialogue.

In addition to the walls raised by religion, caste, class, and gender, there are obstacles created by age, by the rural-urban divide and by classification of the bright and the dull. These obstacles make it difficult to have an honest and heartfelt dialogue on equal grounds. Negative emotions such as jealousy, hatred and competition are sure to impose limits on dialogue.

People will always be different with respect to age, sex, appearance, ability and attitude. This is diversity. Selfish social structures created by mankind have converted this diversity into disparity. That is why we respect people who have a higher social status, we obey them unquestioningly and pay no importance or heed to those

who have a lower social status than us. This inequality affects mutual respect, trust and understanding between people and the resultant love and concern.

## **Dialogue between adults and children**

We have read about the obstacles in communication between adults. We need to consider a few other points while trying to develop a 'communicative relationship' between children and adults.

There is a vast difference between children and adults with respect to their age, information, knowledge and experience. Moreover adults also have the responsibility of the development of children. Hence, adults generally communicate with children assuming the role of a teacher or a parent.

Reasons why adults talk to children

Teaching, training, instructing, getting work done, preaching, information exchange, teaching values, threatening etc.

Adults have the best intentions at heart. Adults are caregivers for children but they should remember that it is their responsibility to reduce children's dependence on them so that children become self-reliant as early as possible. When they are young, children find security in obeying and being cared for by adults. But children are independent by nature. As they grow they consider 'being cared for' as 'interference' by adults. Hence adults need to stop being 'caretakers' for children and should try to help children assume their own responsibility. Responsibility and freedom go hand in hand. How can children learn to assume responsibility if they do not have the necessary freedom? Children have independent thoughts and opinions and their choices, even if not to our liking, are completely 'theirs'. We do have the freedom to express our opinions but if our opinions dominate, influence and dull the child's thoughts we need to take a step back and provide space to the child.

It is the responsibility of adults to nurture and develop their relationship with children. Many things become clear through experience when adults accept the idea of 'communicative parenting' and accordingly participate in the upbringing of children. Negative things such as punishment, insults, compulsion, insistence for obedience, rewards, competition and discrimination are

detrimental for developing a dialogue with children.

Let us reevaluate whether we really need to assume a hierarchical role of a parent, teacher or a counsellor while interacting with children. These roles, in fact, distance adults from children. These roles are stressful for adults as well, making parenting feel like a chore and diminishing the joy in it. Can we not become friends with children for a while? Children naturally learn many things by observing adults. Being a child while playing with children, chatting with them, provides an opportunity not only for children to learn but also for adults to get a breather from the stress of adulthood. It gets us closer to children.

## **Dialogue: An effective medium at Khelghar**

Dialogue has a unique place in every activity at Khelghar. Teachers can make use of multiple opportunities to communicate with children at Khelghar.

Here are a few examples -

- welcoming children to Khelghar
- understanding the child's emotional need, supporting the child where necessary
- developing inner urge for learning in children
- igniting curiosity about the topic in children
- guiding their thoughts to help them reach the core of the topic
- discussing their questions/issues
- helping to strengthen their understanding
- planning activities together
- getting participation from children for planned activities
- resolving conflicts among children
- distribution of work among children.
- emulating the responsible behaviour that follows freedom.

It is necessary to understand children before starting any curricular work with them. It is advisable that the main activities at Khelghar be planned by taking into consideration enough time 'before' and 'after' the activity. Spontaneous conversations during this time can achieve many things.

## Opportunities for dialogue at Khelghar

### Deciding the topic

Life skill development program called “Khelghar” is conducted at Palakneeti Khelghar every Saturday for three hours. We will discuss it in more detail in the subsequent chapter.

Children are involved in detailed planning about deciding which activities are to be undertaken at Khelghar, how to do them and dividing responsibilities related to the activities. Cooking, watching movies, going on a trip, playing and art are some options that Tai can suggest but the choice is left to the children. Children willingly strive hard to take responsibility of their decisions. This effort is indeed their learning!

### Understanding that freedom and responsibility go together

Children have not experienced freedom in any sphere of their life, be it home, school or society. Hence, they might not be equipped to handle freedom when they taste it. In the beginning freedom might be misused. Children become wild, they disturb the class, they misuse things in the classroom. They are unwilling to follow discipline. How to handle such a situation? It is important to have a patient dialogue with children in such situations.

It is the responsibility of every Tai and Dada at Khelghar that any undisciplined behaviour on the child's part be

considered as an opportunity for inculcating self-discipline. Firm, yet emmpathetic dialogue is the only solution. You can read about this in detail in the chapter for 'Positive Discipline'.

### In the formal classroom

The topic to be taught is predetermined in the formal classroom. Although there is less room to accommodate children's choices, it is possible to use discussion to associate curricular lessons with the children's surroundings, their previous knowledge and guide their thoughts to the topic at hand. The activities in the classroom can be classified as below.

- helping children become familiar with the topic
- presenting the main concept
- encouraging children to associate the concept with their experiences
- performing some activity for reinforcing the concept
- discussing about what has been understood

If Tai is successful in getting participation from children in all these activities through various methods then it is possible to associate the subject appropriately with children's experience. We have suggested many resources for shaping dialogue with children and encouraging their participation in the chapter 'Some Valuable Tips' (pages 185 – 207). Curiosity corner, newspapers, daily circle time, decoration are some ways in which Tai can enrich her dialogue with children.



Discussion Forum at Khelghar



## **For developing communication skills in children -**

Children aged six, of first grade start attending Khelghar. They lack even basic skills such as sitting in one place, listening carefully to what is being said, thinking before answering and speaking their mind.

In addition to this they are not aware of the rules and procedures of the classroom. Hence these children behave spontaneously and do as they please. They cause a ruckus, snatch at things they want, they fight and pay no heed to Tai. You might have also experienced the chaos that prevails in a classroom of first grade.

Our goal is to take children from this chaos to a stage where they play together, can sit in one place, participate in the activity that Tai suggests and are able to speak their mind. Let us try to understand how to achieve this in steps.

### **1) Personal chat**

We can place games and educational material for various activities in different corners of the classroom and give freedom to children to choose their activity.

Tai should greet the children when they come to the class. She should teach them to arrange their footwear in a line,

take a mat and join any activity corner in the class.

She should allow ample time for the child to decide what he wants to do. Do not hurry the child.

The classroom should be content rich. There should be attractive materials such as pictures, text, charts and instructions on display in the classroom. At the beginning Tai should take the children around the classroom and read the content aloud. She should talk about that content. After a few days she should ask the children to read the content.

At this stage, Tai's task is to provide varied experiences regarding play and usage of material, allow children to choose an activity and happily engage in conversation if they ask for help.

### **2) Talking about objects**

In the next stage, we want to guide children to talk about something in a group for about ten minutes. This can be a lot of fun for the children if Tai brings along some interesting objects that children find attractive. Objects like a doll, a cat, a puppy, a decorative box, puppets or a mobile toy are wonderful initiators for striking dialogue. Children make sense of objects through listening, smelling, observing, touching, and speaking about it. Before having a dialogue children should experience the

## **Let us see where the medium of speech and dialogue is used -**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1) To convey detailed information about oneself.         | - winning others over  |
| 2) To communicate  | - having discussions without confrontation                                       |
| - enquire, ask questions                                 | 6) Confrontations  |
| - gather information                                     | - being able to understand when one is being deceived or being treated unjustly. |
| - ask for help   | - being able to figure out 'how' and 'what' to talk with the concerned people    |
| 3) To describe an incident or experience                 | - being able to talk calmly and succinctly.                                      |
| 4) To express our feelings and opinions                  | - being able to imagine the repercussions of the confrontation.                  |
| 5) To convince others about our opinion.                 | 7) Bringing about a positive change in the self and in others                    |
| - understanding other's opinions and their rationale     |  |
| - convincing people about decisions for the greater good |  |

object through all their senses. After that Tai can have a dialogue by asking questions such as, “Can you describe this object?”, “Do you like its shape and colour?”, “Why do you like it?” and so on. Children should get enough opportunity to see and handle the object so that they can talk about it.

### 3) Challenging the imagination

In the third stage, we reduce the use of physical objects. For example, we start having a dialogue using pictures, photographs and advertisements. We can sing songs and poems with expressions. The content here is more complex but children can now use their imagination to talk about it.

### 4) Using story books

It is necessary to read illustrated story books with children right from day one. We will explore 'participatory reading' in detail in the chapter on Language. Tai should hold the book in a way that it is visible to the children. Before starting to read she can talk about the front page, the back page, the illustrations, and the name of the story. While reading the book she can encourage the children to talk using the ideas, pictures or words in the book as a reference. After completing the read-aloud she can talk to them about the story and illustrations. Reading books is a particularly important step in language education. This activity helps children to realize that what we speak is in fact written in the book.

### 5) Participating in group activities

- Making simple recipes such as salads or lemonade in the classroom
- Playing a game
- Stringing puffed rice or pieces of paper together, sticking small objects on paper, making collage, clay art
- Drawing using different mediums

Children should get opportunities to participate in a variety of such activities.

Ample opportunity for dialogue can be created before, during and after such activities. Talking about one's work, sharing what was liked or disliked and why, expressing an opinion about others' work are wonderful ways to initiate dialogue.

### 6) Daily Circle Time

Children sit in a circle and Tai encourages everybody to talk about a topic at hand. This activity is called “Daily Circle Time” at Khelghar.

- What did you do yesterday?
- What do we do everyday between the time we wake up and go to sleep?
- Things around the house, around Khelghar
- My favourite thing, person, food item, game etc.
- What do I see on my way to school?

Tai can ask such questions which can be answered in a single word or sentence.

Some children find it difficult to sit in the circle and wait for their turn. They can be allowed to engage in a different activity, provided they do not disturb others.

Topics that are related to children's surroundings are highly recommended. For example, all of us were babies once, now we have grown up. What is the difference between us and babies? Such topics make the conversation interesting.

Rules about conversation need to be laid out beforehand so that the 'circle time' can run smoothly. For example, taking turns while talking, talking only about the topic at hand, being patient with others who take time to speak etc. It takes a while for these rules to be internalized. We need to remind children patiently and often about the rules.

To ensure participation from all children Tai can adopt strategies like asking children to talk one after the other, throwing a ball at someone and asking that child to take a turn, not forcing unwilling children to speak but giving them another chance at the end of the session. Tai needs to keep the attention span of the children in mind while initiating this type of a conversation. In order to develop their capabilities she should also try to pose challenges that stretch their abilities a bit. The most important thing to remember is that effective dialogue between Tai and the children can happen only when their relationship is based on love, friendship and affection. For example, listening to what the children say, making changes to the lesson plans based on their opinions and creating an atmosphere of mutual understanding.

Children are motivated to participate in the classroom activities when they are respected. (Topics for 'circle time' are given on page 112)

## 7) Dialogue about a particular topic

Topics about attitude-development such as cleanliness, organization, discipline, rules, helping others or topics about natural science such as rain, floods, river, wind, trees can be chosen. Tai writes the name of the topic on the blackboard and asks children to think of words related to the topic. Children suggest words and Tai notes them down on the board. Children then choose a few words from these to construct sentences. Children start talking about what they know about the topic - they start sharing their experiences. They ask questions and make the discussion interesting.

These stages are planned according to the difficulty level of conversational skills but it is not necessary to follow this sequence strictly. A physical object can be quite engaging for children who are talking about some abstract concepts. The activity given below which was conducted with children of second grade is a good example of how almost all the stages mentioned above can be seamlessly merged in an activity.

Tai wanted to conduct a read-aloud of the book “Jui Aunty's Baby” by Madhuri Purandare in the second grade language classroom. She realized that the book was a bit too advanced for the current grasping level of the class. She planned a two-day activity, to be conducted for two hours on each day. She commenced the activity by writing the word “baby” on the blackboard and asked children to act like a baby. Children lay on their backs, flailing their arms and legs in the air, they crawled about and cried and laughed like a baby. It was a lot of fun. Then Tai asked the children to suggest words related to the word “baby”. She made a list of these words on the blackboard. Children used the words to make sentences. They shared their experiences about babies. Then Tai conducted a read-aloud of the book. 'Jui Aunty's Baby' is a wonderful book written through the perspective of a young child who is discovering what it means to 'grow up'. A single reading might indeed be insufficient for children to understand this.

Children talked about “babies” before, during and after the read-aloud. They loved the book.

The next day, another Tai at Khelghar brought her six-month-old baby to the class. Tai had also arranged the baby's clothes, toys and other things in the class before

children started to arrive. After entering the classroom children started to observe and feel all these objects. Tai told them the name of the objects. She wrote all the specific vernacular names for each item on the board. The baby and her mother arrived soon after. They were greeted with great excitement. The baby was placed in the center of the room and everybody gathered around. Children were observing the baby closely with great curiosity. They started talking to the baby, asking the mother questions about her baby. This turned out to be a wonderful dialogue.

“Tai, this baby is just like Jui Aunty's Baby!”

“Tai, what is baby's name?”

“Ireen!”

“Wow! That is such a different name!”

“Tai, what does Ireen mean?”

“Ireen means 'peace' in the Irish language!”

“Does that mean that this baby does not cry?”

Tai laughed. “Not at all. She cries often. That is her language right now. She cries when she needs to tell us something. She cries when she is hungry or needs to pee or poo!”

“All she does is drink milk, sleep, wake up, pee and poo, cry... then sleep again... what a fun!”

“Tai, what does the baby eat?”

“A baby doesn't eat anything; she only drinks her mother's milk!”

“Tai, how do you know when the baby is hungry?”

“She cries, I know that she feels hungry every couple of hours.”

“How many times does she poo?”

So many questions! Children were playing with the baby. When it was time for the baby to leave children tagged along till the end of the street waving their goodbyes.

Children drew a picture of a baby after returning to the classroom. They wrote about the baby using the words written on the blackboard. It was great fun. “Jui Aunty's Baby” became their favourite book. They started narrating the story to others. They started to imagine themselves as the big sister in the book and started to think of advantages of growing up.

Children were obsessed with 'babies' for the entire following week. They were telling each other about their



neighbour's baby, their aunt's baby and so on. This activity was successful in accomplishing goals regarding listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Children immersed themselves in the topic. If the activities at Khelghar are planned by taking the children's experiences into consideration then no extra efforts are necessary for capacity building. They will develop naturally. This method of teaching ensures that children above fourth grade have sufficiently developed communication skills such as listening, grasping, speaking, questioning and patience. Children are now ready to participate in Khelghar's 'Discussion Forum'. Chapter 'Discussion Forum' (pages 103-128) will talk about this in more detail.

We talked about Play-Art-Dialogue separately for our

convenience but it is necessary to consider them in conjunction with one another in the process of teaching. There are similarities and differences between these themes.

Working with these three themes achieves the integration of the mind, the body and the intellect, possibly in different proportions. For example, the body is on the forefront during play, while the mind plays a more important role in art activities and the intellect is more active during dialogue. That is why activities at Khelghar should be planned by integrating these three themes. The focus can shift from play to art to dialogue based on the children's age group as well.

