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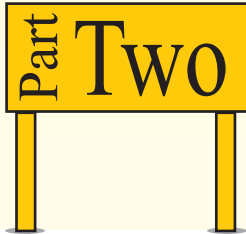
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People who work with children are often referred to as teachers, activists, or facilitators. In schools, teachers are called Bai, Madam and Sir. In Khelghar the teacher interacts with the children in various roles such as a guide, a motivator, and 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.



Life Skills Education



The goal of life skills education is to make children capable of leading their life with joy, confidence and sensitivity. The development of habits such as cleanliness and orderliness and capabilities such as thinking and emotional management are essential for this. A positive change is needed in views about gender equality, consideration for others and many other aspects.

Inculcating the values of liberty, equality, fraternity and tolerance is also the foundation of education. This is natural learning. The child imbibes these values through her experiences at home, school and in society.

Can life skills be taught? The answer is 'No'. Children learn in their own way through the experiences obtained in their social environment.

It is of utmost importance that children become 'thinking' beings. It is important that they understand a situation by thinking about the reasons behind events and their consequences. In any given situation they need to be prepared not only to make decisions that benefit everybody but also to assume the responsibility of those decisions. We can provide various opportunities for positive experiences for children at Khelghar to achieve this.

Khelghar has designed two important activities namely, 'Discussion Forum' and 'Saturday Khelghar' for the development of life skills 'Play, art and dialogue' are the three mediums for these activities. 'Discussion Forum' and 'Saturday Khelghar' activities involve activity-based programmes and modules related to various topics. You will find details about this in different sections of this chapter.

This chapter talks about the process behind the changes that take place at an abstract level of the mind and thoughts and at a concrete level of behaviour.





Children's 'Home'

Children decided to build a house in a corner of the terrace at Khelghar. They used to bring along construction material such as bricks, mud, dried coconut branches everyday while coming to Khelghar. Children became totally engrossed in the construction and decoration of their house. Later, they enjoyed sitting in the tiny space of their house to study and to play because it had become their 'home'.

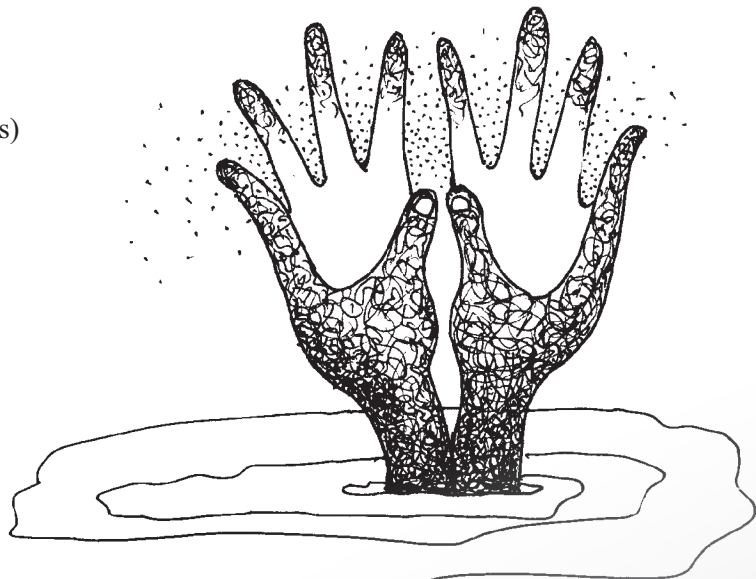
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‘Saturday Khelghar’: A creative endeavour!

What's learning?
It's awakening confidence within
Walking on one's own feet
It's knowing the social fabric
And stepping forward for Change
It's an experience of freedom
Exploring new ways of living
to claim our rights as human being

Learning is to be able to speak out
Loud and clear
And to struggle and seek answers
Learning is about designing, constructing
And communicating
It's also singing, smiling
and forever blooming!

Poet - Unknown
(Translated by - Mohan Des)



In the preceding chapter, we discussed about the three mediums namely, play, art, and dialogue and their effectiveness. The ‘Saturday Khelghar’ activity integrates these three mediums while working with children. It provides an opportunity for children to start from any task that they find enjoyable, kindles their creativity, their thought process and helps them to enjoy the experience of learning something new. This indeed is the ‘master key’ to the educational paradigm of ‘constructivism’ wherein learners construct knowledge through their own efforts!

Khelghar is the title of an important project of the Palakneeti Parivar. ‘Khelghar’ is also the name of the weekly activity conducted for life skill development. This activity is conducted every Saturday and hence it is also known as ‘Saturday Khelghar’.

The planning of ‘Saturday Khelghar’ is quite different from the usual study classes. Here, children have the

space and freedom to move freely about and to express their joy and enthusiasm. ‘Play’ is an integral part of Khelghar. Tai also participates along with the children. This helps to create an open and informal environment. Barriers break down. It creates an enthusiastic environment where everybody wants to work together to create something new.

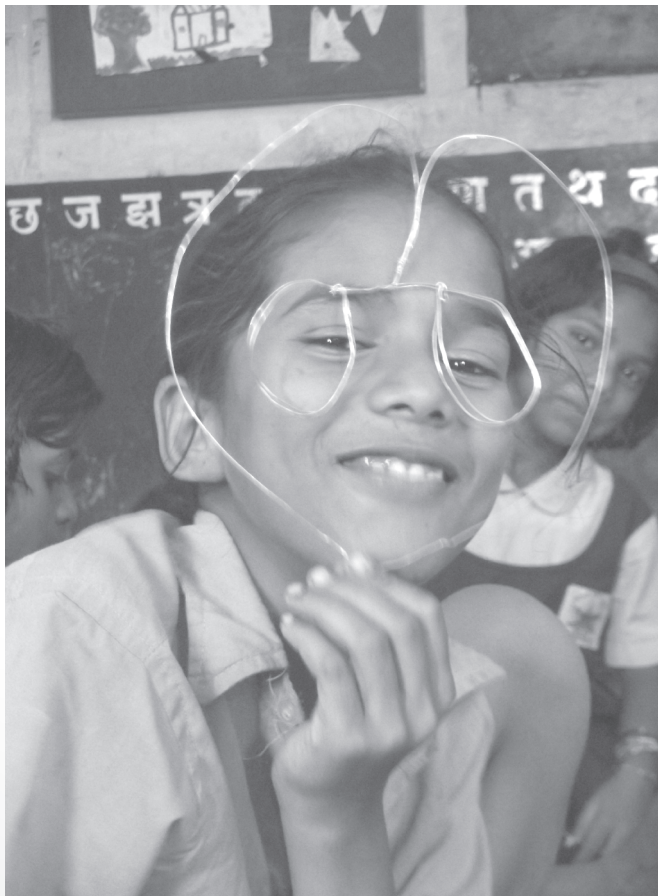
‘Khelghar’ is primarily designed as a creative structure to develop life skills among children. Expression is as important as play at Khelghar. Children express their abstract emotions through the mediums of art and dialogue and they gradually start thinking about what they like, what bothers them and what they desire. They start to ask questions and seek answers.

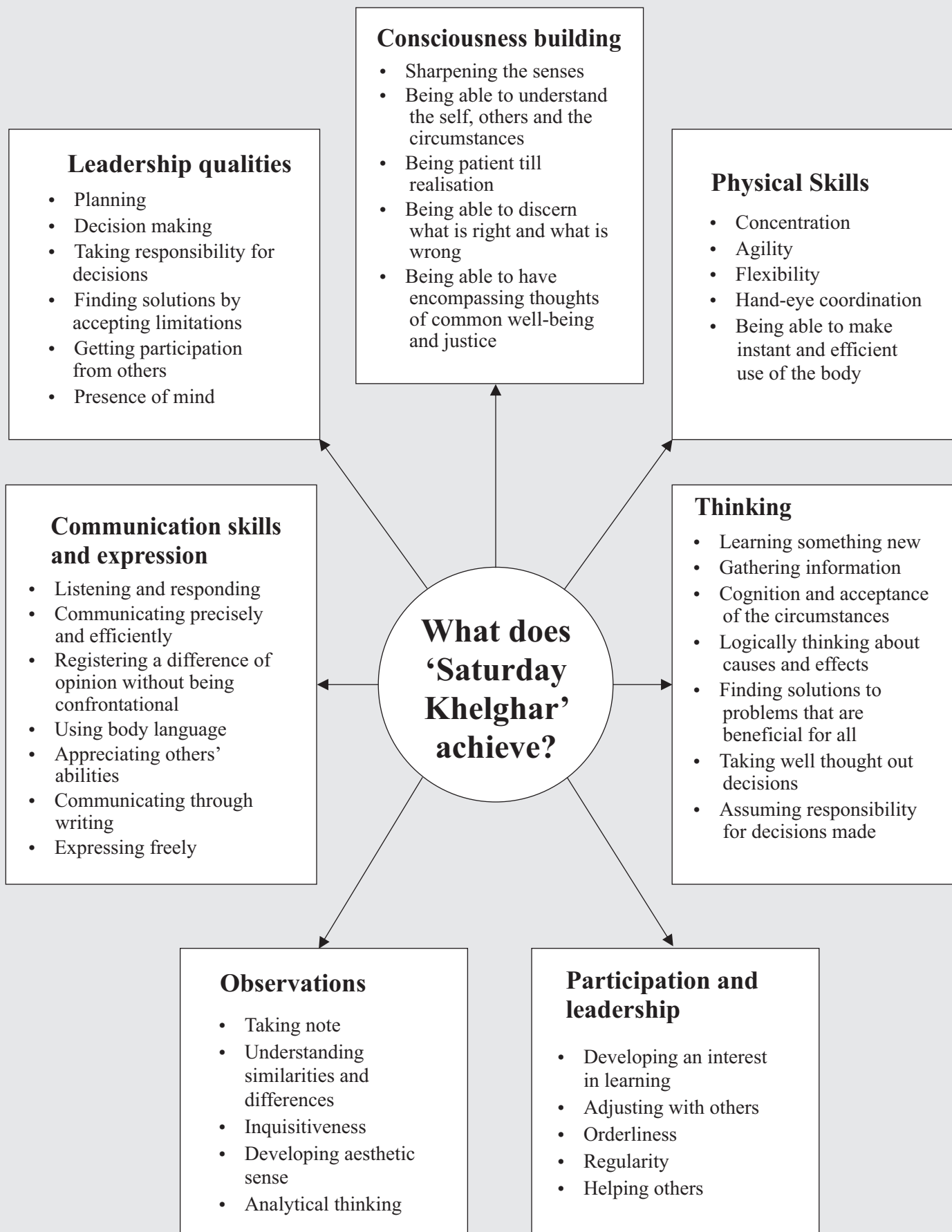
In this activity, children should get opportunities to ‘do’, and to learn while doing. Creating materials such as posters, news bulletins and manuscripts, putting up a play, cooking something that everybody likes, gardening, cycling, learning some skill like using the computer are some examples of activities that can be planned at Khelghar.

The experience of creating something concrete with their own hands provides motivation to children. It provides implicit encouragement for children to be active. Children write and publish their stories, enact them and exhibit them. The whole process provides children with the opportunity to articulate and present and is a wonderful learning experience. Being able to speak in front of an audience and getting appreciation motivates children.

Here is an example of an activity at ‘Saturday Khelghar’ The topic of discussion for children of second and third grade was ‘wind’. Tai started the session by reciting a poem by ‘Shankar Vaidya’.

Children of the wind
Go round and round...
They take spin and
Fall on the ground.
Up they go they laugh and play
Round and round they float away
Off they go on their way.

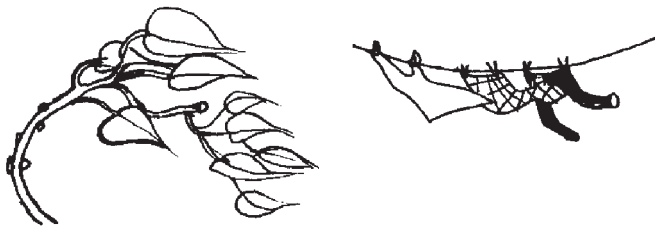




After the first reading of the poem Tai said, “Get up dear ‘Children of the Wind’! This poem is about you! Become the wind, run...”. Tai started to read the poem rhythmically and the ‘children of the wind’ started to enact it. There was a lot of laughter. Then Tai said, “Let’s play a wind-game!”

Tai said, “Here comes the wind, here comes the wind...the wind is howling...”. The children began to run helter-skelter and extremely fast. Seeing that the children were having fun, Tai said, “The wind is flowing in a single direction only.” Children understood that now they had to stop running helter-skelter. A couple of children started running ahead of the others and guided the rest to follow them in a single direction. Tai slowly said, “Here comes the wind...it is now a gentle breeze.” Children slowed down.

“The wind is laughing, dancing and playing with the trees and leaves.” Children frolicked around. A few children became trees and a few became leaves. They started to sway. “The wind is now going around in circles; it is a tornado!” “From out..in..in...” then “from in...out...out”. Children started running in circles. “The storm has abated...” Children slowed down. Lastly, Tai indicated to the children to lie down quietly on the ground.



After everybody settled down Tai started to chat with the children. “Can we see the wind?”

“No.” answered Rajesh.

“Yes, Tai, we can see it – we can see the leaves of trees move.”

“Our hair blows, clothes that are hung out to dry also blow.”

“That is true, isn’t it?” said Tai, “the wind is sometimes strong enough to even push us!”

“Yes Tai, it makes us feel cold.” Shilpa quipped.

“Tai, my village is a lot windier than Pune.”

“Why might that be?” Tai enquired.

“No idea!”

“Tall buildings in the city obstruct the wind. There are no obstructions in the village, so it feels windier.” Tai explained.

“Do you want to listen to the wind?” Tai asked. “You have to listen very carefully. Close your eyes and be still. Keep your ears open though!”

Tai played the initial pieces from the album “Desert” by Ustad Zakir Hussain. The album has a rendition of the wind, initially slow but increasing in tempo to convert into a storm. These sounds are rendered through an orchestra of musical instruments. The storm subsides. The music dies down and all becomes quiet. Tai let the children experience this quietness for some time and then asked, “How do you feel now? Do you feel like you are experiencing the wind? Can you feel it inside?”

“Yes Tai, it feels wonderful!”

“Let us now try to show the wind through our drawings. You can draw anything that you like but your drawing should have the wind in it.” The children were enthused. They took their art material and started to draw. They had no problem depicting the wind in their drawings. Some children drew bold lines to depict the wind and the storm. Some drew trees swaying in the wind. Some showed clothes being blown away and kites floating in the wind. The wind came alive through their drawings. A child drew a picture of a coconut tree, quite bent in the wind. Another child drew a drawing of herself standing at the top of a mountain, with her arms wide open as if waiting for the wind to lift her off. Then, the children put up an exhibition of their drawings. A few children spoke about their drawings. Others chose to watch quietly. After watching all the drawings to their heart’s content the children and Tai spoke about their memories that these drawings brought back, memories of village life and vacations.

“But how is the wind created?” someone asked. Tai explained about air pressure and the movement of air from high to low pressure areas. Discussion about the relationship between the wind and the rain; the wind and the sun ensued. There was a discussion about the damages caused by winds, waves, and Tsunamis.

Children listed words describing the wind. Tai noted them on the blackboard – gentle, howling, fickle, fast, slow, stormy and so on. Tai added new words like

pleasant and destructive to the children’s vocabulary. Tai continued, “Our temperament is also like the wind. Raju is fast, Shobha is quiet.” Children appreciated this concept. They thought of adjectives for each other based on the temperament of their friends. Ravi – stormy, Rahul – wild etc. They even named Tai and called her “breeze”.

A beautiful picture emerges in front of our eyes through this example of Khelghar. Children are playing happily, having fun, it is a wonderful congruence of freedom and responsibility! Tai comes up with new ideas in response with the energy created by children. Everybody gains new experiences in their own sphere and everybody learns.

This environment of joy, enthusiasm, exploration and learning is the ‘Saturday Khelghar’ at Khelghar!

To put it more succinctly “Khelghar is a structure which facilitates learning by helping the learner to reach the depths of any subject. It works by integrating the body, mind, and intellect through the mediums of play, art and dialogue.” Children should get the experience of Khelghar at least once a week. A time slot of two to three hours should be set aside for this activity. Tai should decide how many sessions a particular topic will require depending on her and the children's readiness.

‘Khelghar’ is a flexible structure. The activities at Khelghar provide a joyful learning experience for children and develop many capabilities. Children start thinking consciously. Tai also becomes ‘child-oriented’ and creative while conducting activities at Khelghar.

Saturday Khelghar is not bound by any approach, place, time or any subject. There is no need to impose limitations about a particular way in which the Khelghar activity should start or end. It is not necessary to include play, art, and dialogue in every session of Khelghar. Tai should design the activities as per the situation with the consent of the children.

However, certain things need to be kept in mind though -

- Tai can plan the ‘Saturday Khelghar’ but the plan should

The structure of Saturday Khelghar that materializes through the mediums of play, art and dialogue

- Tai and the children immerse themselves in the topic
 - Expression by connecting with our sensibilities
 - Asking questions, awakening the curiosity
 - Exploring various aspects of the topic
 - Being motivated to proactively seek more information to improve one’s understanding
 - Exploring through activities
 - Sharing newly understood facts with each other and understanding them.
- (Sum up)

be flexible to accommodate changes according to children’s state of mind and their opinion.

- Joyful learning should be given more importance than discipline.

- Everybody should get a space for expression.

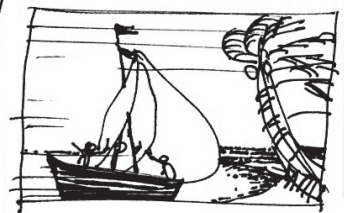
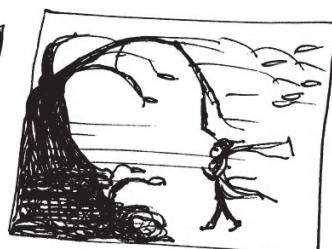
- We should try to do away with incorrect methods such as rewards and punishments and try to inculcate self-discipline in children.

- Competition should be avoided at Khelghar. Cooperation should be encouraged.

- We should try to nurture an environment that encourages children to be curious, raise questions and motivates them to seek answers on their own.

- It is important that Tai is not stressed while doing this. Stress can cause serious damage to her relationship with the children; hence it is of utmost importance that Tai be joyful.

When Tai newly starts working with the children she is



enthusiastic about trying out new ideas and activities but she is inexperienced in many aspects. In addition to the children's circumstances, sensibilities and language she also needs to learn the informal approach at Khelghar. She needs to make a conscious effort to change her fixed notions and treaded path.

She must consciously try to absorb new values and ideals. Children are Tai's trusted companions in this journey! The harmonious relationship between Tai and the children helps her to face all these challenges.

Gradually Tai becomes adept at conducting 'Saturday Khelghar'. Let us understand a few steps therein.

Steps in the Khelghar activity

Befriending children

After starting Saturday Khelghar, the first step is to understand the different lifestyle, language and circumstances of the children. Adults must make conscious efforts to ensure that their friendship with children flourishes naturally. Here are some of our findings-

- Do not hurry 'studies' until a healthy relationship is established with the children. Learning is not restricted to textbooks. We should try to channel our

learning from day-to-day activities in a more conscious and positive manner. Children are in a state of confusion when they arrive at Khelghar from the basti. There is disparity between them and Tai with respect to their age, caste, education and financial status. Informal chat with children helps to understand many things and thus helps in reducing this distance. Informal chit-chat opens a window for Tai to understand the children's home environment, their thoughts, and sensibilities. Children are also curious about Tai. They ask her a lot of questions. They extend their friendship through questions like "Don't you have to go home and cook dinner?" The extent to which the relationship flourishes depends on how Tai responds to these questions.

- Visiting children's homes, getting to know their parents, noting their way of life and deprivation with sensitivity is a huge learning experience for Tai. She finds answers to many of her questions by doing this.
- Children and Tai converse while working together in a group. In addition to this, children want Tai to take interest in them and talk personally with them. These personal conversations aid in understanding the child



Children engrossed in the game of musical chair. Here the chair is the top of the adults.

better. The time when Khelghar starts and children start trickling in one-by-one is a wonderful opportunity to have personal conversation, to chitchat and to play with the individual child. When children bring something along to show Tai or purposefully wish to convey something to Tai, it can be safely assumed to be the start of a beautiful friendship.

In the first step, the focus of Khelghar should be for Tai and the children to understand each other.

Adding play

It is important that some activity takes place in Khelghar while the bonds of friendship are being formed. Children cannot remain engrossed in the world of words for a long time, they need activity. The convictions and methodologies of the educational system that we have experienced while growing up are embedded deep in our mind. It is quite understandable then, if we are tempted to start the activities at Khelghar with a prayer. It is important though, to resist this temptation and give precedence to play.

Children are always ready to play. We should start with games that children enjoy the most. In case a playground is available we can conduct games such as Langdi¹, Kabaddi, and Kho-Kho. Indoor games such as playing cards, carrom, Challas-Ath², Hopscotch, Dog and the Bone are also quite enjoyable. After a few days, children start enjoying language-related and mathematical games suggested by Tai. Before starting the game it is important to decide the rules as a group and to understand the proper method of playing. This needs to be discussed together in the group after the game is over as well. There can be a discussion on points such as - what are the specialities of this game, how did everybody play the game, what are the strengths of the individual player, what can we do to play this game more skilfully and so on. This discussion facilitates in converting the experiences obtained in the game into understanding. 'Games' can also be a topic for 'Saturday Khelghar'. Play provides joy and helps build abilities through understanding the games and their characteristics. This is learning!

Fun Factor for the Day

To establish a close bond with the children it is appropriate that Khelghar should start with something

that they enjoy and can easily do. At the same time children should also get new experiences. Tai should make conscious efforts in this direction. The topic at this stage is, "Kindling curiosity in the children's mind through a new experience"! What can this 'Fun Factor for the Day' that provides different experiences to children be?

- A picture, song, poem, book, a newspaper article that Tai has enjoyed.

- A new game, toy, puzzle etc.

- Some attractive object such as a stone, a feather, jewellery, a doll etc.

- Young one of any animal.

- An antique object.

- An object related to the topic to be taught on that day.

Once Tai becomes engrossed in Khelghar she automatically starts to notice things around her. In fact, she gets a new perspective towards commonplace, mundane objects! For example, one day Tai brought a Japanese doll as a guest to the class. Discussion about her clothes, her hair and her style started. A few girls imitated her posture. Children started to imagine what the Japanese doll would do, or say, if she visited Khelghar. Karishma said, "She will think, what kind of children are these! They are just laughing and playing...not studying at all!" Sana added, "This is not how it is where I come from!" Tai told the children about the condition of women in Japan. In addition to having fun, children participated in a discussion on quite a different topic. At this stage, "Fun Factor for the Day" guides children to enhance their knowledge. This was an example of using a concrete 'fun' object. It is Tai's responsibility that the children be exposed to something new every day in the class. Tai's skill determines how enriching these new experiences are for children.

Practical activity

"I heard, I forgot,

I saw, I remembered,

I did, I understood."

We have extended this saying by Confucius to include

"I did it over and over again, I learnt"

Children not only learn by doing but it also helps in their attitudinal development. It is a different kind of fun

¹ A game like Hopscotch

² A local game like 'Ludo' that is played with pieces of glass and tamarind seeds

altogether when children at Khelghar cook something for everybody and partake together. Activities that are a part of cooking such as making a list of ingredients, shopping, cooking, serving and cleaning up can be assigned to different groups. Boys should be encouraged to do activities such as cooking, serving, washing utensils etc that are considered traditionally to be ‘women’s work’. Girls should be given the opportunity to tackle tasks such as handling money and shopping which are traditionally considered to be ‘men’s work’.

While doing such activities ideas and discussions about gender equality are implemented practically. This is the first step towards inculcating a positive outlook.

If there is an open space around the Khelghar then children might enjoy gardening there. It offers an excellent opportunity for studying science and waste management. Children develop a sense of belonging towards Khelghar when they participate in tasks like cleaning the Khelghar space, decorating it and preparing it for activities along with Tai.

Children can actively contribute in many activities such as building a fort, putting up exhibitions, shop-fair and so on. Activities like stitching, cycling, drawing collectively on the walls of Khelghar speed up the process of learning through the integration of the mind, body and intellect.

Towards positive discipline...

The work at Khelghar takes a couple of years to stabilize. Children start attending regularly. Friendship blossoms between Tai and the children. She can see positive changes among the children and gets inspired by those changes.

Tai will face certain challenges here at this stage. Children have now become familiar with Khelghar. They know Tai’s working style and approach. Their linguistic and thinking skills also are developing. Children now become argumentative, they become less inclined to listen to what Tai says. Some boisterous children might also tend to misuse the freedom at Khelghar. Hence, it is especially important for Tai to adopt the principles of positive discipline at this stage, else she might lose her confidence in the ‘Khelghar approach’. This is described in more detail in the chapter **“To Inculcate Positive Discipline...”**. At this stage, ‘Positive Discipline’ should

be the topic for ‘Saturday Khelghar’. Issues that arise in the classroom can be chosen for discussion.

For example, fights between children, differences of opinion between girls and boys, things that Tai and children do not like about each other, planning for the activities in the classroom and so on. Skits or games like “What will I do if...” can be effectively utilized to initiate conversations about topics such as children’s experiences with adults and their behaviour, violence experienced by the children and its effects. The conversation can be followed by a discussion about what can be done to avoid such situations at Khelghar. Children and Tai can, as a team, think of activities through which positive changes can be brought about among children who are too boisterous or causing damage or are lagging behind.

Teamwork with the children should be emphasized at this stage. Activities like cooking, organizing special programs and festivals, planning for picnics are helpful for fostering teamwork. Discussions during the planning, the preparation, the actual activity and the evaluation help to develop many skills and sensibilities within children. This helps to build a relationship of mutual trust, respect and understanding between people and develop as good human beings. People are naturally diverse. This diversity should be understood and respected. It is important at this stage to realize that it is up to us to avoid hierarchy in relations.

Connecting with the society

The circumference of children’s knowledge and consciousness expands as they start to gather information about themselves, their family, school, basti, city, state and their country. Social science means the people around the children, systems created by those people and the justice/injustice within those systems. This is what academic textbooks try to teach. Khelghar needs to extend the scope of this ‘information’ and help children to connect it with their life, their experiences and initiate self-efforts to derive ‘knowledge’ from it. Children need to come out of the four walls of the classroom and their surroundings. And the people therein and their systems need to enter the classroom. Some activities can be planned to accomplish this. For example -



Youth Group



Fun factor for the Day: Japanese Doll!



Activity: Children are building a small house on the terrace at Khelghar.



**Towards positive discipline:
The plant and phenol stall at the hop fair.**

Colour-Cousins



Children were introduced to various shades of colours in the “Journey to the Land of Colours” activity given on page 96.

Children expressed their understanding of shades through their drawings. Children coloured square-line papers with various shades of the same colour. Then, they cut those squares out carefully, and created compositions using them. They named these drawings, “Colour-Cousins”

This is how the atmosphere at Khelghar should be.

Conscious efforts are needed to create an atmosphere where children willingly come to Khelghar. Tai should think about how she can develop a welcoming environment which conveys to the children that they are wanted at Khelghar. Tai who greets the child arriving at Khelghar with a pleasant smile and a welcoming word, gets a special place in the child's heart.

The place of Khelghar plays an important role in making children feel pleasant and creating an atmosphere conducive for learning. A clean and orderly place not only welcomes children but also succeeds in making them feel ownership and responsibility for keeping it that way.

The child sees and notices things as soon as she arrives and stands at the entrance of the Khelghar and whatever she sees, shapes her emotions. Tai should keep this in mind while arranging pictures, writings, books and other learning material throughout the classroom. This helps the Khelghar to communicate with the child and the child in turn opens up. "Creating the atmosphere at Khelghar through children's participation" can be a topic for Khelghar. Keeping our Khelghar clean, decorating it, planning for novel activities, deciding the rules of Khelghar, publishing a Khelghar newsletter, etc. are some examples of activities that can be conducted.



**Children of the wind
Go round and round.....**

Sample topics for the 'Saturday Khelghar' activity

- **Nature**
 - Soil, trees, wind, rain, sunlight, forest, animals, birds, seasons etc.
- **Science**
 - Air, water, sound, science in the kitchen, sinking-floating objects etc
- **Health and hygiene**
 - Cleanliness, diet, illness, medical facilities etc
- **Relationships**
 - Home, family, friends, school, gender, marriage, festivals, occasions etc
- **Society**
 - My basti/city, public facilities and amenities, library, temples, vehicles, railway station, elections etc.

- Take the children to visit places such as the cobbler shop, place where puffed rice is made, vegetable market, hospitals, bus stands etc.
- Go around the basti and make a note of available public facilities and amenities.
- Visit places related to any specific topic – such as railway museum, historical museum etc.
- Find information about pets and stray animals in the basti.
- View the basti from the top of a hill and draw a picture-map of the same.
- Invite people of different professions of the basti and interview them.
- Understand the history of the basti from the elderly populace.
- Invite musicians, singers and artists to Khelghar and converse with them.

For the ease of implementation, Khelghar has compiled a curriculum of such activities. It includes topics such as -

- Exploring oneself
- Relationships

- How do we learn?
- My basti
- The society and me.

There are detailed lesson plans about how activities around these topics can be conducted by considering the capabilities and age groups of children. The topic ‘Exploring Oneself’ is included as a separate chapter in this book (pages 130–155). It will be useful as a reference.

Topics such as my village/city, my country, weather and climate, health, festivals and celebrations, rural India etc. can be chosen according to their relevance, need and capacity and interest of Tai. For younger children topics such as travel, animals, vehicles, my home, school, colours etc. can be chosen.

Building a positive outlook

Once there was a theft at Khelghar. Some older boys were suspicious of Suresh. “I am sure Suresh has stolen the money!” Ravi declared. Umesh supported him saying, “He should be taught a lesson. He should be ashamed of stealing money from Khelghar!”

Tai calmed them down and asked, “Do you have any proof?”

“Search his house Tai, you will find the money for sure!” Ravi suggested.

“Is it right to accuse him just based on your suspicion? If he has not stolen the cash imagine how horrible he will feel!”

Children kept silent but they did not agree with Tai’s



Visit to the railway museum!



Discussion with our Japanese guest, Mr. Tajima Toshio

Mr. Tajima Toshio, a teacher from Japan visited Khelghar multiple times over 4-5 years staying for a month's time on each visit. He used to bring photographs showing the seasons, attire and traditions of Japan. There used to be discussions about these over a map of Japan. He also tried to teach the children Japanese and tried to learn Marathi from them and was moderately successful in doing so as well. He used to arrange for and take the children on picnics. Children developed a bond of friendship with him. He valued children's laughter and happiness and they were inspired by his enthusiasm and willingness to do hard work.

perspective. There was unrest in their mind. Tai spoke with Suresh one on one and Suresh confessed to have taken the money. He returned the money later and the chapter was closed.

Children learned a valuable lesson about how problems can be resolved in a fair and thoughtful manner. Suresh returned the money and other children became friends with him again!

Teachers at Khelghar face many disturbing behaviour and experiences with children at Khelghar. For example, fighting among each other, hitting someone in a fit of rage, taking the law in one's hands and justifying that behaviour, considering girls to be inferior, bullying someone, casually pelting stones at stray animals and so on. Such experiences can be quite infuriating for Tai.

There is disappointment as well when the behaviour does not change even after repeated admonishments. What is necessary is to understand the reasons behind such behaviour.

Children knowingly or unknowingly learn from the people around them. Incidents happening at home, basti, school can create incorrect notions in their mind. For example, "Males are aggressive, dominating and strong whereas females are sensitive, fragile and cry-babies." These notions have a strong hold on the children's mind. This affects their behaviour. Preaching about how one should or should not behave has no effect other than

making children want to avoid us.

Children living in basti are often attracted to and are in awe of hooligans or political leaders who can impress others with their oratory skills. Children feel respect often laced with fear towards those leaders. They unknowingly start imitating them. Children often express opinions such as, "In order to live in basti being nice is not sufficient; one needs to have power!" They often take sides and justify someone involved in fights in the basti.

Khelghar should be a platform for attitudinal development not only on social issues like gender equality, opposing consumerism and environmental awareness but also towards developing relationships based on coordination, transparency, understanding, respect and trust.

Encouraging children to think about the welfare of everybody especially against violence is quite essential. It is important to discuss the causes and effects of an event and its possible repercussions in a calm and thorough manner so that children understand that aggressive violence can never do any good.

We can use various tools and resources to conduct such discussions. For example, asking the children to complete a story about a specific topic by thinking about possible positive and negative outcomes can result in excellent discussion.

We can stimulate their thought process by discussing the

real meaning of words such as “sanity”, “prudence” and “empathy”.

Our experience is that such discussions result in children developing greater faith in rational thinking. This leads them to understand what is beneficial for them and for others and thus motivates them to act accordingly.

Here is an example from Khelghar.

Children were presenting a skit about their school on the occasion of Guru Pournima¹. Their hostility and anger towards their school teachers was obvious through the skit. There was one teacher who seemed especially notorious with children.

The opinions expressed during the discussion about finding a solution to this problem ranged from ‘he needs to be taught a lesson’ to ‘we should behave properly’. Tai encouraged children to think about the repercussions of each solution. The discussion included both the teacher’s and the students’ points of view. After the discussion children decided that, "Tolerating injustice is not a solution. We should present our problem to the headmaster unitedly and constructively." Children presented a skit on how they should behave based on their decision and what would be the resultant outcome.

For inculcating social responsibility among children

Children have experiences of the customs, traditions and social systems around them and the injustice and



Colour of my dress is 'Salmon'

discrimination involved therein. Sometimes they meekly accept the status quo but sometimes they question it. It makes them angry and restless. Khelghar should provide space for children to express all these feelings openly.

Positive steps towards solutions can unfold when children get free from the influence of emotions and start thinking rationally about what bothers them, why it bothers them and the reasons underlying the situation.

We can organize visits to a few places so that children become aware of, feel and understand the deprivation and poverty in the society. Places such as an orphanage, a blind school and observation homes can introduce the children to a totally different world. We can help their impressionable minds to experience empathy. We can provide opportunities for inclusion by conducting activities such as having older children teach the younger ones at Khelghar, or inviting differently abled (blind, handicapped) children from the basti to Khelghar.

We can create our own festivals and occasions such as ‘Health Fair’, ‘Science Fair’, ‘Women’s Day’ and celebrate these days in the basti by putting up skits, exhibitions and screening films. These alternative festivals set a positive ideal for children. This is covered in more detail in the section ‘Special Programmes’ (pages 166-183).

Despite discussions about how Khelghar should be or how it should not be, it is difficult to truly understand

¹ Day according to the Hindu calendar for expressing veneration and gratitude towards teachers

what Khelghar is. It is impossible to understand the essence of Khelghar unless one assumes the role of a child and participates in the activities at Khelghar. Participants in the annual workshop targeted for those who want to start a new 'Khelghar' get an opportunity to experience this. Let us try to experience this through an example of a complete activity at Khelghar. This will paint a beautiful picture for the reader and will help to associate the concepts discussed so far.

“Journey to the land of colours”

The topic chosen for the three-hour long activity at Saturday Khelghar was “Journey to the Land of Colours”. The participants were children from fifth to seventh grades. Both Tais at Khelghar had discussed and made plans about how to expand the topic. The main goal of this activity for Tai was to help children express through colours, make them realize the importance of colours in our life and learn to look at colours consciously.

Planning

Tai had put up prints of a few drawings by famous artists on the pin board. Drawing material was kept in one place. Both Tais started to make shades of colours while waiting for the children to arrive. Just then Raju and his friends arrived at the Khelghar. They were in a mood to chat and have fun.

They calmed down a bit after seeing the peaceful and quiet atmosphere at Khelghar. Tai welcomed them with a gentle smile. Amit was a bit quiet. Tai approached him and asked gently, “Is everything OK Amit? You seem a bit upset.” He shrugged it off and changed the subject of the conversation. Tai made a note of it and thought of dealing with Amit later. Just then Nikita, Omkar, Vidya and the rest of the children entered with flowers and leaves in their hands. Tai was pleased to notice that the things that children had brought along could be made use of for the topic of colours that day.

Approaching the topic

The session started with children's favourite game, 'Tipi Tipi Tip Top'. The child who has the den chooses a colour and the rest of the children find objects of that colour. Those who cannot find an object of that colour are eliminated from that round. Children were trying hard to

think of a colour different from those already covered. In the beginning children chose obvious and common colours. Tai then suggested that Vidya, usually a shy child should take the den. She willingly came forward. She chanted, “Tipi Tipi Tip Top” to which the children replied, “Which colour do you want?”

“Salmon”, pat came her reply. Children scurried to find objects of this colour. Those who could not visualize this shade were confused. During this confusion, Sana who was usually quite reserved stood smiling with her hand on her dress. Amit saw this and realized, “Quick, Sana's dress is of salmon colour!” The fun and the spontaneity in the game started to pick up. Tai took this opportunity and took the den on herself and introduced children to shades such as magenta, grey and turquoise. She also wrote these new words on the blackboard.

Being imaginative

Tai wanted to introduce shades of various colours to the children. After the kids were tired of playing the game Tai asked them to sit with their eyes closed and listen to all the sounds around them. Once the children were quiet and able to concentrate Tai began saying, “I am going to describe a scene now. Listen to me carefully”.

“Rainy season has just begun. It is raining everywhere. Everything is a shade of green. Mother earth's thirst is now quenched and she is content. Grass saplings sprout from the earth and get drenched in the rain.

Frogs are singing their rain song. All of you are out on a picnic on the hills. You are singing and making merry, enjoying the rain. You are not worried about getting wet or having a fall. You are now on top of the hill and behold! What do you see? The leaves, the flowers, the grass, the branches are all black and white in colour! You look up at the sky and that too is black and white. You have no idea what is happening. Your clothes are black and white as well. You are utterly perplexed, and you look at each other's faces, searching for answers.” Tai stopped her narrative and asked the children, “How did you find this picnic?”

“Boring!” Vidya exclaimed.

Vinod quipped, “It would be quite dull.”

Laxmi noted, “Tai, we don't want such a colourless hill and Nature. It won't be any fun.”

Tai asked, “What kind of nature do you like?”

Children enthusiastically replied, “We want nature to be full of colours, alive with birds, animals and trees!” Tai observed, “Yes indeed. We need colours around us. Else it is just so dreary, isn’t it? Let us have a journey to the land of colours! Tell me the names of all the colours that you know of.” Children started rattling off names of colour shades that they knew. Tai wrote them on the black board.

Expression

Tai asked, “Can you tell me which colour will be formed if I mix yellow and blue together?” Children’s answers ranged from brown to sky blue. Tai performed this experiment in front of the children. Children were surprised to see green colour being formed. After watching this children wanted to make their own colour shades rather than just keep talking about colours.

Tai distributed square-line papers and material required to create shades of Colours.

She gave instructions and informed the children about a few precautions to be taken while mixing colours. For example –

- The goal is to make different shades of the same colour by adding black or white to make it darker or lighter. After that we can mix different colours together to make new shades.

- You must paint inside the borders.

- Colour alternate squares, so that colours do not bleed into each other.

- After the squares are dried, cut them carefully with a pair of scissors and use those squares to compose your drawings.

She displayed a few compositions as an example and children got on to work. They started making shades of colours as per their liking.

Surprisingly children were also ready to express what they felt. Ajay observed, “Tai, when I mix a drop of black with a drop of white they mixed together to form a grey-coloured cloud!” Pallavi exclaimed, “So many colours can be formed by using just a single colour. These are called shades of the colour, aren’t they?” Tai smiled and nodded.

Children cut out the coloured squares from their papers. Their task was to make a collage on a plain paper using those coloured squares. Children were busy trying out various compositions and visualizing their pictures. Then they started to paste those pieces on a plain paper. People, skies, trees, necklaces, potted plants, and brick walls started to appear on their papers. (See image on page 12) Tai suggested that children could write something about their pictures.

Children named these pictures. Creating shades of colours, composing them into a picture and writing about the picture were not easy tasks for the children. Their efforts proved that once children get engrossed in a subject that they like they can achieve anything!

Expansion

Tai took the topic ahead after seeing children’s enthusiasm. She read aloud an excerpt about “The vitality of colours” from the book “The Blank Canvas” by Prabhakar Barve to take the children towards the abstract thought of how colours affect our mind and emotions. “Colours speak to us when we listen to them quietly. Light colours whisper. Bright colours create a hullabaloo. All colours behave differently. The colour yellow is easy going, beautiful and welcoming. It mixes easily with any colour and radically changes that colour. Blue is cool but adamant in nature. It does not get along with everyone easily but can assimilate those colours that it gets along well with, also managing to retain its identity. Red is the colour of virility; it rules wherever it



Colourless hill

goes. It is ruthless and arrogant but honest. It is unwilling to adjust. Black is suspicious, green is stubborn while white is placid, joyful but commanding and influential. White shares equally close relation with all colours; close, yet awe-inspiring.”

The room was quiet after Tai finished her reading. Some children were beaming while some looked confused. Tai purposefully asked, “Do you wish to say anything about this?”

Amit confessed, “It was difficult to understand Tai, but felt nice to listen to.”

Vidya expressed, “Red is such a bold colour!

It is the colour of our blood; hence I am scared of it.”

Sana noted, “White is such a calm colour! It makes us feel calm too.”

Vijay said, “I feel very happy when I see red or pink.”

Seeing that the discussion was getting interesting and that children were willing to talk more Tai put forth another point for discussion. “Can you tell us about the colours that you like or dislike? You also have to tell us why!”

Children immediately raised their hands to talk.

Ajay said, “I am afraid of the colour grey because it is the colour of the cloudy sky. I am afraid that those clouds will fall on me.” Vidya said, “I love green colour because I can find many cousins of green in nature.” Rahul said, “I love red because my mother had bought a red car for me when I was a child. I love it and still have that car.”

Nikita narrated her experience. “Tai, I used to be afraid of black colour because it is the colour of the night and one cannot see anything in the dark. To get rid of this fear my aunt used to take black objects in her hand and help me to gently feel those objects. I used to be so scared that I used to shut my eyes tightly! My aunt used to sometimes take me outside in the dark. But now I am not so scared of black colour.”

Yasmin said, “I love the pink colour of the rose. It smells heavenly and makes me feel very pleasant.” “What do you mean by feeling pleasant?” Tai asked. “It means that I feel fresh and all dullness disappears.” Priya said, “I am afraid of ghosts in the dark. So, I ask my mother to accompany me to the bathroom.”

Children were engrossed in their experiences and were

exploring their relationship with colours. They were expressing freely. Tai told them why she liked blue. “I like water; it reflects the blue sky. When I see the beautiful, blue gurgling water I feel very enthusiastic and happy!”

Wrapping Up

While closing the session Tai said, “We explored and understood colours and their shades for over three hours. We created shades of colours. We now know about the importance of colours in our life. Can you tell me what you have understood?” Children tried to convey what they had understood and enjoyed. “I learnt about colour shades”, “Colours mix with each other to form cousins.” “I like the fact that red is honest because I am like that too!”

“I liked the game ‘Tipi Tipi Tip Top’.”

“I came to know of new colours such as Salmon, Magenta and Grey.”

“Tai did not let the session become boring and that is why we could play with colours so much!”

“I was upset when I arrived today at Khelghar but then I got engrossed in the colours.”

“We need colours in our life, else it will be quite boring.”

“Tai, we can create moods by using different colours!”

“How?” Tai asked.

“What I mean is, we do not paint the walls of Khelghar with grey, do we? We need pink, light green and such colours.”

“I have an idea Tai! I will cover my notebook with a red-yellow coloured bright paper so that I will feel like studying.”

“That’s a great idea!”

Tai also expressed what she liked about the session. “We do not have to wait for others to add colour to our life. We can colour it ourselves! You were engrossed in this topic for over three hours without getting bored. We did not fight amongst ourselves at all. That is what I liked the most!”

This is the ‘Saturday Khelghar’ endeavor to be joyful, creative and meaningful for the children and Tai as well!



Seemingly simple things that we should consciously



LISTEN TO CHILDREN

And they will feel worthwhile and think well and find good solutions for problems.

RESPECT CHILDREN

They will grow up respecting themselves and others.



APPRECIATE CHILDREN

For who they are,
For what they look like,
For having their own
notions and interests.



imbibe in our co-existence with children

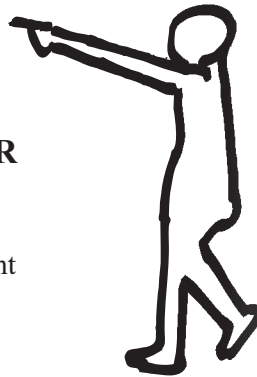


ALLOW THEM TO BE AFRAID AND UPSET

Tears and tantrums are healthy. They help to get rid of sadness and frustration of children.

ALLOW THEM TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS

Because that way they will grow up confident and able to make decisions.



PLAY WITH CHILDREN

They learn and grow and love while playing. Let them choose and lead the games.

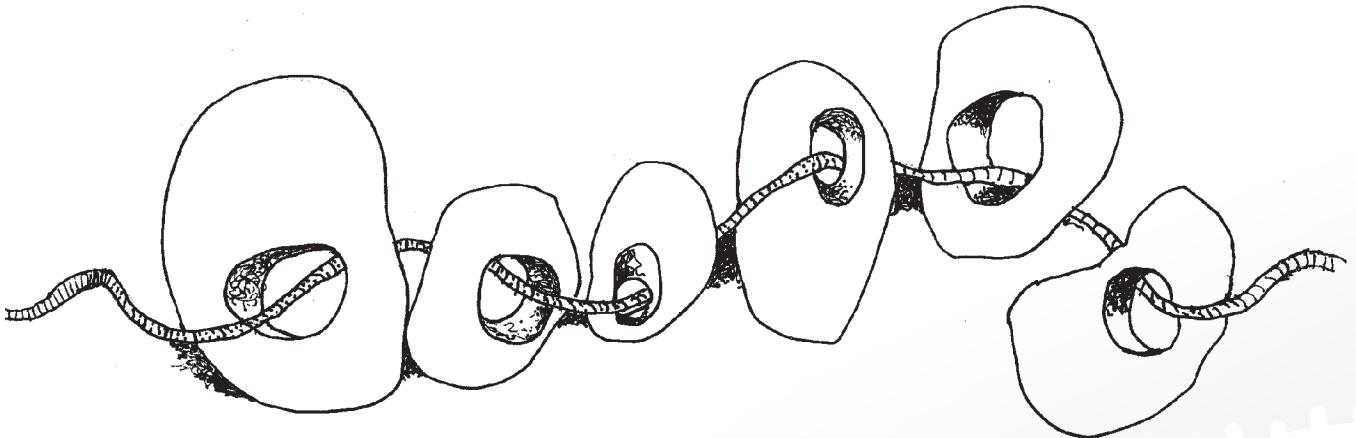
'How to give children an emotional head start ' by Marion Riekerk, Publisher : Rational Island Publishers
Concepts of parenting precisely put forth in this book inspire us. Thank you!



Discussion Forum

Speak gently; it is better far
To rule by love than fear:
Speak gently; let no harsh words mar
The good we might do here.
Speak gently to the little child;
Its love be sure to gain;
Teach it in accents soft and mild;
It may not long remain.
Speak gently to the aged one;
Grieve not the careworn heart:
The sands of life are nearly run;
Let such in peace depart.
Speak gently, kindly, to the poor;
Let no harsh tone be heard;
They have enough they must endure,
Without an unkind word.
Speak gently to the erring; know
They must have toiled in vain;
Perhaps unkindness made them so;
Oh, win them back again.
Speak gently: 'tis a little thing
Dropped in the heart's deep well;
The good, the joy, which it may bring,
Eternity shall tell.

by **George Washington Langford**



“Tai, on my way home, I notice this particular man behind the bus stop every day. He bullies a couple of young children. He hits them and shouts at them. I feel angry, I feel like standing up to him and putting a stop to his bullying. What should I do? Can we discuss this in our Discussion Forum?” - Danish from eighth grade confided in Tai. Tai was impressed by Danish’s sensitivity. The topic was naturally chosen for that week. What exactly is the Discussion Forum at Khelghar? What is its purpose, approach and structure? Let us try to find answers to these questions in this chapter.

To put it succinctly, the Discussion Forum at Khelghar means a regular dialogue between Tai and the children. It means understanding each other, the conditions and the issues around us. It includes discussing the pros and cons of a situation and reaching a higher state of perception. It is Tai's responsibility to give a positive direction to the

discussion. Interactions in Discussion Forum can be based on topics derived from our efforts to understand what is happening around us, planning for events, issues about discipline at Khelghar, disputes and fights between girls and boys etc.

The need for Discussion Forum

In the section ‘Dialogue’ from the chapter ‘Play, Art and Dialogue’, we explored opportunities for conversation apart from the Discussion Forum at Khelghar. Let us try to understand the need to have a planned and defined Discussion Forum.

For the time being, let us put aside our conversations involving children. Let us think about how people converse with each other.

- Typically, adults have a very superficial conversation involving work or enquiry.



A discussion forum on 'Ganpati Utsav'

- Conversation in close relationships is limited to expressing emotions.
- Conversation between peers is mainly focused on entertainment such as making fun of each other, jokes or gossip.
- Work relationships involve strictly professional conversation.
- Professional work is also related to personal life and emotions. It is difficult to separate the two but we hardly pay attention to this fact. Even in personal relationships, do people make a wholehearted effort to understand each other? Do we really have conversations that help to further our perception or understanding? Many times we resist such conversations at a subconscious level. We may think that we cannot afford the leisure of trying to understand a subject to the core. Unless it is related to professional work we don't think the effort is essential. The reason why we resist this effort and take such a stand is that getting to the core of any subject and speaking about it creates a certain amount of stress and that stress causes discomfort. There are many reasons for this. Hardly anyone makes a conscious effort to forge relationships based on respect, trust and understanding. Relationships reek of hierarchy and selfishness. There is a thirst for power and control. There is personal politics involved. This is the reason why real conversations cannot proceed in relationships. Words either turn into disputes or stay mute like the underlying emotions. They rarely turn into a dialogue. The other reason is that nurturing social sensitivity requires a person to be able to express opinions fearlessly, clearly and openly. People fear that doing so might damage their social image. Lack of communication that extends one's understanding, deprives one of the opportunities to hone the skills required to have such a conversation; abilities such as listening, articulating precisely, being patient, thoughtfulness and decision making. Conversations that extend our understanding and change our perceptions are closely related to our enrichment as human beings. Conversations between people and with children do not venture beyond a certain limit. This is not beneficial. We should try to create opportunities for meaningful dialogue. This enhances our insight of relationships, the society around us and our life!

Conditions at the Basti

Opportunities for conversation are further reduced in the bastis in city. People here work longer hours, they spend considerable time in their commute and the work is physically taxing.

Basti dwellers work at the lowest rungs of the social and financial hierarchy as unorganized laborers. They are treated as inferior and insulting treatment that damages their self-esteem is meted out to them. Hence, negative emotions such as anger, depression and fear can easily overpower them. They do not have access to the peace and quiet that is required to make thoughtful and insightful decisions. Their tendency is to just scrape through the current situation without thinking too far ahead and meekly accept the status quo. This leads them to unwittingly become slaves of the situation.

Children who grow up in such households naturally imitate adults around them and distance themselves from dialogue. Since they have never experienced a dialogue that helps to enhance their perception they are deprived of the understanding and the joy that dialogue provides. The skills needed for such a dialogue are also not developed.

This is the reason why, when people or children in the basti come together for making a decision their discussion quickly turns into a dispute and a fist fight. Influences such as gossip, rumors, superstitions, violent and aggressive behavior, political influence and addictions also play a part.

Khelghar volunteers feel heartbroken when they see children behaving in such a manner but they realize that merely advising or preaching about the good behaviour is of little help. The only solution is to create opportunities for children for open yet thoughtful conversation with each other.

At Khelghar we conduct a Discussion Forum for children above third grade. Our experience is that this activity helps to bring about a positive change in the outlook and behavior of the children.

Let us try to understand what the Discussion Forum is.

What is the Discussion Forum?

Two hours a week are devoted to the Discussion Forum at Khelghar. Discussion Forum is an important educational structure developed for children from third grade up to the youth group at Khelghar.

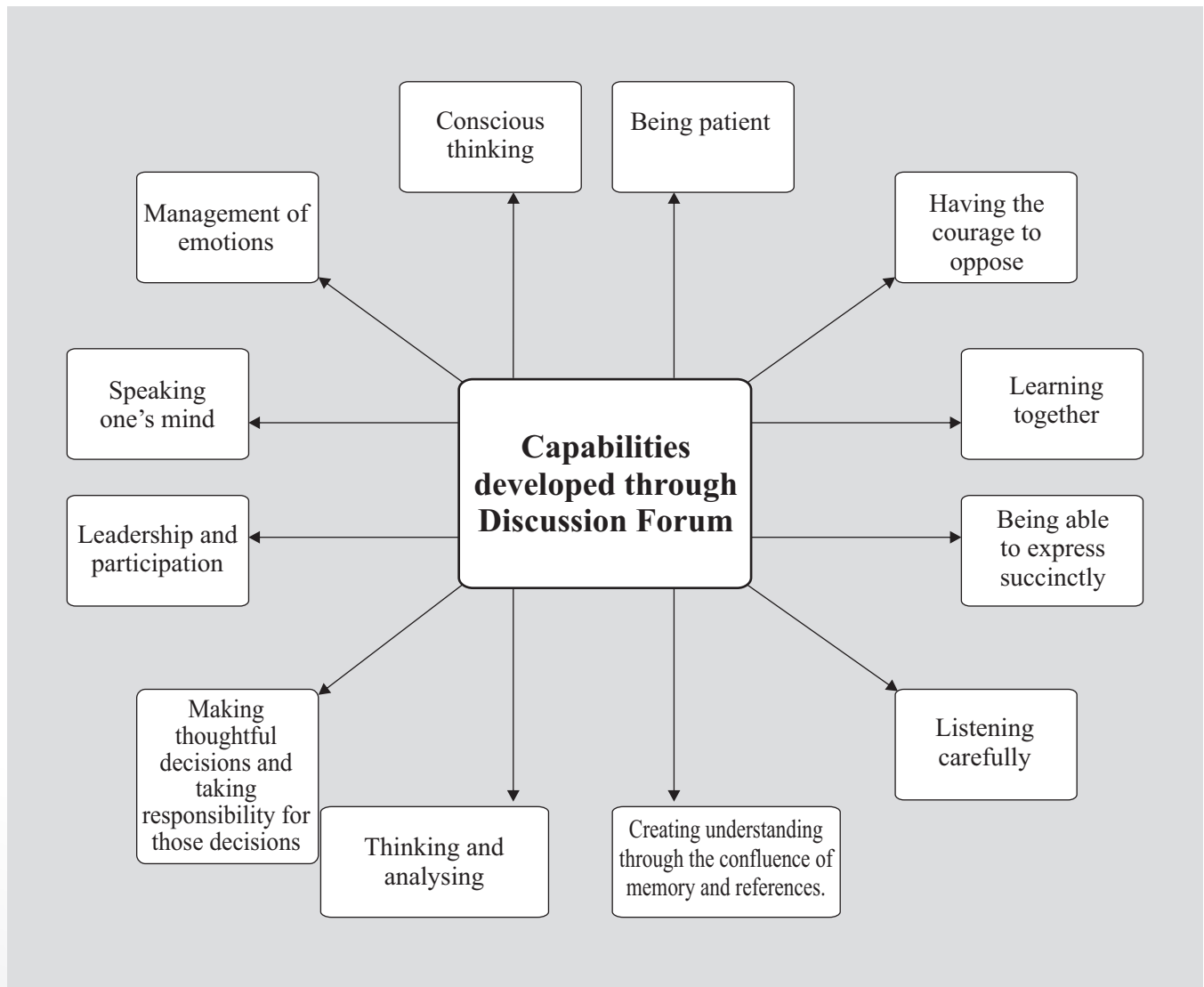
This requires conscious efforts to develop the skills of listening and speaking among the children of first and second grades. Details can be found on pages 77-80.


Devoting half an hour for this activity is enough during the initial stages while children are still getting used to the Discussion Forum but the duration should gradually be increased. After children develop a liking for conversation, understand its importance and start to participate even two hours are not enough!

Unlike meetings of adults Discussion Forum is not a place for formal discussions. Meetings focus on work and the discussions revolve around the work. People and their emotions are not relevant in meetings. But the Discussion Forum accepts everybody as they are along with their merits and demerits. Feelings of the participants are given more importance than the

conclusion of the subject being discussed. It is a place for everyone to express their emotions. It is a place where emotions are ‘thought over’, accepted and channelized into prudent outlets.

Discussion Forum does not mean casual chit chat either. It is not something to be conducted offhandedly but is a process to be undertaken thoughtfully with participation from everybody. Ridicule, derision and insults are unacceptable in the Discussion Forum. A conversation that takes place by bringing all participants on the same level and that is based on mutual respect and trust is expected. Even if a serious accusation is made or abusive language is used by someone, the group tries to understand it. At the same time the group tries to make that person understand with sympathy the futility and the one-sidedness of the outburst. The tendency to easily





**Let me not pray to be sheltered
from dangers,
But to be fearless in facing
them
Let me not beg for the stilling
of my pain,
But for the heart to conquer it.
Let me not crave in anxious
fear to be saved,
But hope for the patience to
win my freedom.**



- Ravindranath Tagore



accuse and gossip about those absent from the group is also discussed, debated and condemned. Thoughtfulness naturally supplements free expression of emotions.

In short, Discussion Forum is not a technique but a process. A process of developing bonds between relationships and elevating the understanding of the entire group.

What happens at the Discussion Forum?

- Every participant gets the experience of being heard by the group. This improves their self-esteem.
- Tai gets an inkling of what goes on in the children's mind and what they are thinking about. She understands children's nature and their issues. She understands the reasons behind their behaviour.
- Participants develop a bond of friendship and understanding. Misunderstandings are cleared and a cohesive group starts to form.
- Since the activities of the Khelghar are planned by the group itself children's participation and cooperation in the activities increases. As the children have contributed towards formulating the rules their willingness and responsibility to follow them naturally increases. Self-discipline is boosted, communication skills are developed, self-confidence increases and children are encouraged to express themselves.
- Children develop a habit of expressing themselves precisely and clearly.
- Unasked questions are expressed in words. Children feel the need to try to understand the complexity of their thoughts.
- To be able to listen carefully and understand someone else, it is necessary to be patient and keep a check on one's urge to talk.
- Listening to others awakens something in one's mind. This emotion finds expression.
- Children freely talk about their experiences, feelings and questions.
- Misunderstandings, resentments and animosity can be resolved.
- Children realize that it is necessary to think about the causes and effects of any incident/situation to find the way out.
- Children explore parameters for deciding what is right and wrong. Their thoughts and actions find appropriate direction.
- Children think over their prejudices and start to accept that others can have an opinion that differs from theirs and that their opinion can also be equally valid.
- When we listen wholeheartedly to a person, we begin to understand her/his nature and can talk freely about it.

What should the Discussion Forum be like?

Number of children in the group

Everybody in the group should participate. If the group is too big it is not possible for everybody to find the opportunity to talk. Hence, the number of children in the group should be around 20-25. A minimum of 7-8 children and Tai are essential to ensure that the conversation covers different facets.

Girls and Boys

It is advised to have an equal number of girls and boys in the Discussion Forum. Girls and boys have different experiences and hence their outlook is also different. This difference in outlook provides new dimensions to the conversation and the process of constructing knowledge is enriched. In addition, nurturing a sensitive outlook towards people of the opposite gender is extremely essential. The age difference between the children however, should not exceed three to four years. A sizeable difference in the level of understanding can be damaging for the conversation.

Seating arrangement

Both, Tai and the children are equally important in the Discussion Forum. A classroom-style arrangement with children seated in rows facing Tai is not suitable for the Discussion Forum. For the Discussion Forum everybody sits around in a circle. The seating arrangement should be comfortable and easy. Lying down, leaning on each other and such informal behaviour should be discouraged



Dialogue preparation

This is often observed

Adults, since they have assumed the responsibility of children's development often speak with children in a rigid and typical manner, only about certain things.

When we enter a conversation with children assuming the role of an 'adult' with the intent of teaching, preaching, instructing, getting the work done, advising, giving and receiving information, or imparting morals the conviction that underlies the behaviour is either "I have no time for this", or "He/she does not understand anything" or "Why is he/she wasting time on unnecessary things rather than study?" or "Now that I am spending my time on this I might as well teach him a thing or two". Such attitudes nip any possibility of a meaningful conversation in the bud.

because it would reduce the seriousness of the conversation.

The ambience in the group

A peaceful environment is indispensable for the Discussion Forum as it triggers the thought process. There should be no fear in the group but some curbs need to be put on self as well as others to ensure that everybody behaves in a decent manner. As the participation in the group increases the ability of the group to restrict indecent and unacceptable behaviour within the group also increases. Mutual friendship, cooperation and understanding is the aim and means to achieve at the Discussion Forum. If positive practices are consistently discussed, reinforced and imbibed by the children it enriches the dialogue at the Discussion Forum.

The environment of the Discussion Forum should be open. Children should not be afraid of older children or Tai. If children with a tendency to bully and dominate are unwilling to change then it is advisable that they are excluded from the group for a while. This decision, however must be made by the entire group. If there are any differences between Tai and the children or between girls and boys or between older and younger children they should be resolved in the Discussion Forum itself. There should be continuous effort to create and maintain

a relationship of understanding and cooperation between girls and boys.

Tai should pause in case some children cause trouble and behave in an indisciplined manner. She should rethink about her outlook towards the children and how it affects them. Tai has certain opinion about every child. These opinions can at times be quite strong. Tai's behaviour in the group can be influenced by these opinions. For example, a child who is intelligent as per Tai's opinion getting a chance to speak first, expressing anger towards a child who is troublesome, taunting children who have a lower capacity of understanding, being sarcastic, talking about a child's shortcomings in the group, comparing children etc. are behaviours that are subconsciously displayed by Tai.

Such negative behavior demoralizes the child and has a damaging effect on the group process.

Tai should reflect on her own convictions to avoid this. Every child has some positive trait. A child can leave his shortcomings successfully behind only if Tai makes it a point to know his plus points, talks about them in the group and trusts the goodness of the child. On the other hand if Tai feels hurt by a child's behaviour she does not have to bear the insult silently. She should talk to the child in person clearly about it. The opportunity to understand someone is important for the child as well. After this discussion irrespective of whether the child apologizes or not there should be no residue of anger left in Tai's mind. Only then will she be able to love the child again. Love and empathy for children is the foundation of the Discussion Forum. How can a strong structure be built if the foundation itself is weak?

Rules of the Discussion Forum

Children who have experienced the joy of having a meaningful conversation through their participation in the Discussion Forum can form rules for the group. They can also keep a check on whether others abide by those rules. They realize that the responsibility of ensuring those rules are followed is a collective responsibility and does not solely rest on Tai's shoulders. It is important that children recognize the behaviours that cause difficulties in the process of communication. Only then can children take the responsibility of following the rules. Discussion Forum can also include conversations about the group process involved to achieve this.



Listening, speaking...expressing oneself.

The core of the Discussion Forum

Irrespective of the topic undertaken Discussion Forum works through the integration of information, perspective and capacity development.

Speaking their mind

Emotions and thoughts unfold in children's mind as a result of their experiences. They try to understand things based on their pre-existing knowledge. The Discussion Forum should try to provide an opportunity for the children to carefully think about their experiences. A discussion about the repercussions of an incident, everybody's feelings about it and questions about the incident is the main aspect of the conversation at Discussion Forum.

For a participant to feel comfortable to speak openly in the group, she needs to trust the group to listen to her carefully. The strength of the group is trust! Tai must make a conscious effort to nurture such trust in the group.

Getting new information

Khelghar is the bridge between the outside world and the children's world. Tai's sphere of experience and information is and should be far wider than that of the children. Hence, she should present interesting information and experiences that children can connect to their world. She should prepare content and educational material in such a manner that children derive something new from the Discussion Forum.

However, the entire session should not focus only on giving information. Children should get the opportunity to understand the information, connect it with their life, express their feelings about that information and explore new perspectives. Tai should also read and think about the information beforehand and formulate her opinion about it. This will ensure that she does not get frustrated during the conversation with children. Tai needs to devote explicit time to this analytical exercise. Only then can she direct the Discussion Forum in an appropriate direction.



Forging a positive outlook

Children should reflect upon their preconceived notions so that they can develop a positive outlook. They should feel the need to have a positive outlook. The Discussion Forum can try to develop a discerning attitude within children.

There should be a thorough discussion in the Discussion Forum about a given situation from possible positive and negative angles, its repercussions, the advantages and the disadvantages arising out of it. The discussion can be channelised positively from the perspective of common benefit. Tai gradually has to learn this skill.

Capacity Building

Effective communication is a very complex ability. It is developed through the coordination of multiple abilities. The Discussion Forum acts as a medium for developing the following abilities for both Tai and the children.

Management of Emotions

Some children might make accusations against Tai during the discussion and openly point out her mistakes. Discrepancies in her behavior and speech might be realized. In such a situation Tai should be able to deal with her emotions without getting angry.

An outburst of negative emotions such as anger, restlessness, boredom, frustration, inferiority complex, and fear are quite possible during the discussion. One needs to control these emotions in a heated moment, saying “We can talk about this later because I am feeling quite angry right now”, is an option. Understanding and accepting emotions and channelising them thoughtfully in a positive direction is a long and arduous but essential process. After the discussion once everybody is in a calm state of mind one should be able to mull on questions such as - Why do I react in a certain way? Do I need to rethink my expectations and notions? Does the other person harbour any misunderstanding about me? How can I resolve it? Discussion with peers can help to clarify these issues.

Listening

Careful listening is the first step towards speaking precisely and appropriately. Many times while listening, various thoughts cross the listeners mind and she fails to listen to what the speaker is saying. Listening actively to





the words being said and deriving meaning from non-verbal communication such as the body language of the speaker is the first and the foremost ability needed for communication. It requires a positive attitude and skills such as being quiet, listening carefully, having respect and trust for the speaker and feeling the need to understand.

Speaking

The speaker's words prompt the listener to think in a particular direction and incite the listener to express his thoughts verbally. Two distinct skills are required to be able to speak precisely and effectively. The first is weeding out the unessential from the content of our expression and presenting the rest to the group using precise words. The second is expressing thoughts audibly, clearly, sincerely and with appropriate tonal variations so that the group is more likely to receive them well. It requires being patient when we do not get a chance to speak immediately in the group and noting down the points that we wish to make waiting for an appropriate opportunity to express the point, showing the desire to speak by raising our hand and presenting our point effectively by attracting the group's attention.

Courage to express a difference of opinion

Sometimes one feels the need to express a difference of opinion or oppose a certain point under discussion. The situation can potentially turn into 'me versus the entire group'. The ability to defend one's point of view courageously and appropriately, while knowing that the majority has a different point of view is important. At the same time it is equally important to be receptive to

change one's opinion by listening to others. Opposing for the sake of it does not lead us anywhere.

Being Patient

It is necessary to be patient for being able to sit through, focus, and participate in a discussion that extends in many directions. Efforts are required to patiently wait for others to finish their turn. The ability to wait patiently for our turn develops gradually.

Thinking and Analysing

Since there are many participants in the Discussion Forum and everybody expresses their opinions based on their individual experiences, various aspects, outlooks and details about a topic emerge during the discussion. A complex process of changing preconceived notions by understanding new aspects of the topic and formulating new thoughts takes place in the Discussion Forum. For this, the mind needs to be fresh, alert and free. Everyone should be willing to break the rigid framework created by preconceived notions. .

Leadership and Participation

Active participation in the Discussion Forum requires an energetic disposition. Some people tend towards being passive and inexpressive. It is necessary to instill the capability to distance oneself from this state of lethargy and to participate in or lead the discussion.

In addition, capabilities such as imagination, planning, problem solving, decision making, assessing and discerning between right and wrong are also developed through the Discussion Forum.



Chit-chat to Conversation

Development of a few basic capabilities is essential for an effective conversation in the Discussion Forum. Hence it is necessary to allot a dedicated ‘chit-chat’ time for the children of first to fourth grades. Activities like ‘Circle Time’ can be introduced at the beginning of the class. A group chat for around 15-20 minutes can be organized. Conscious efforts are essential for the development of basic and seemingly simple skills such as sitting in one place, listening, taking turns to speak and speaking thoughtfully about a specific topic.

Some topics for chatting

- What did you eat today, what did you like?
- What did you see on your way to school? – Fun at school.
- Something about your mother, father, sister, brother, teacher etc. that you like and dislike
- Younger siblings and their antics
- Your favourite animal or bird
- Games that you play on the street and your experiences
- Television programs that you watch, which ones do you like and why?
- A positive quality or something noteworthy done by the child sitting next to you
- Something nice that happened yesterday or last week.
- What if a book or a toy could speak? What would it say?
- Bring a newspaper clipping and talk about it.
- Bring an object that fits in your fist and talk about it.
- Close your eyes and sit quietly. What comes to your mind?
- What would you like to share about festivals, celebrations and guests?
- What will you do if...?
- Categorize your likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses as good or bad.

You can think of many such topics for discussion. Many times children address only Tai while speaking. We need to remind them to address everybody in the group by saying, “Everybody is listening to you. You need to tell them as well.”

There are opportunities for conversation and chit-chat other than the ‘Circle Time’ as well. Conversations can be started by displaying a small object to the children. For example, any object, a person, a book, a place etc. Poems, songs, stories, read-aloud, news, puzzles and games can also motivate children to speak and to think.

Children are not aware that the Discussion Forum works towards developing these capabilities. Hence it is necessary to speak often with them about it. It is also possible to plan a session of the Discussion Forum for specifically targeting a particular capability from this list. Every conscious or subconscious effort towards developing these skills should be appreciated in the group. It should be consciously discussed so that others derive encouragement. The Discussion Forum aims at development of all these abilities. Hence, providing children with the opportunities to test and hone these capabilities is a part of the curriculum of the Discussion Forum.

Topics for the Discussion Forum

Activities at the Khelghar

Activities at Khelghar such as cooking, gardening, celebrating festivals, shop-fair, annual days and workshops provide opportunities for topics to be undertaken at the Discussion Forum. Distribution of work, management, rules and regulations, finances, assessments are wonderful topics for discussion.

Some topics for the Discussion Forum

Understand the self and others

- Likes and dislikes
- My strengths and weaknesses
- My situation/surroundings
- Desire, need and luxury
- My goal
- Future and dreams
- Issues/questions that bother me
- What influences me
- Arguments, disputes and fights

These topics can be taken up for discussion from the perspective of the self, friends, parents, teachers, neighbours or even the society.

The chapter 'Exploring Oneself' (page 130-155) gives more details about this.

Adolescent psychology

- Changes occurring in the body and the mind and how to handle them
- Unpleasant touch
- Gender differences
- Understanding emotions

- Hygiene, diet and health
- Attraction – friendship – special friendships – love – marriage
- Choosing a life partner
- Influences, groupism and eve teasing
- Freedom from addictions
- Choosing a career
- Rights and responsibilities

Understanding the world

- Happenings in our surroundings
- Picnics, study tours, interviews etc.
- Exhibitions, plays, cinema, speeches etc.
- Elections, terrorism, competition
- Understanding about the work, culture and surroundings of the visitors to Khelghar
- People, systems, cultures
- Environment
- Values
- Traditions, rules and structures
- Disputes, crimes

Study topics

- Curricular subjects, concepts and their real-life application, reasons for studying each subject and its use.
- Experiences of children and their teachers, their questions and motivations.

Deciding the topic for the Discussion Forum

Many things need to be considered before deciding the topic for discussion.

1. Discussions held, points noted and decisions taken by the Forum in the past
2. Points of contention amongst the children or between Tai and the children.
3. Any important positive or negative incident that might have occurred in the Basti or in the society.
4. A recent heart-touching experience or news.
5. Any special incident that might have taken place in the group.
6. Planning of future activities at Khelghar

All these things need to be considered before deciding the topic for discussion. You can also choose a sub-topic in conjunction with the main topic. It is important to prioritize the points that come forward during this

process. Let us look at an example of how to choose a topic for the Discussion Forum from the host of possible topics.

Tai had a few options in mind for the topic of discussion for that week. She had recently participated in a discussion regarding water shortage. She strongly felt like sharing the information she had received in that session which was related to the drought-like conditions prevailing at that time.

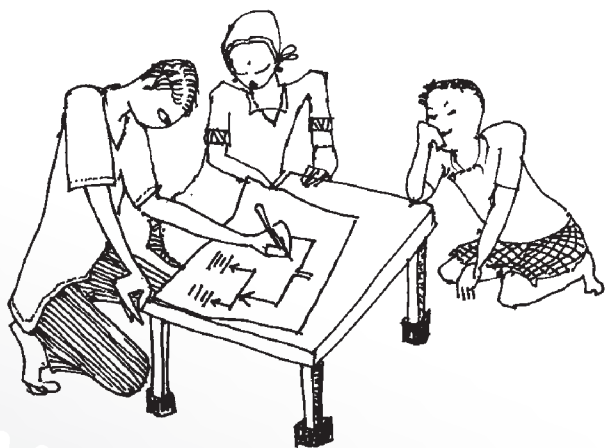
- Children had suggested the topic ‘How to resolve fights’ in the previous session.
- The Nagapanchami¹ celebration was scheduled for the coming week and had to be planned with the children.
- Two children in the group were bothering everybody with their unruly behaviour. It was necessary to bring up that topic for discussion in the group.

How should the topic for the Discussion Forum be decided in such a situation?

Tai believed that it would be unfair to discuss the unruly behaviour of the two children directly in front of the group. The two children would feel cornered and would withdraw. It was necessary to talk personally with them first. It was decided that the Nagapanchami planning would take place during the Saturday Khelghar. Tai prepared for the two other topics and asked the children to choose between them. The children were experiencing extreme water shortage and hence chose that topic. After such a thoughtful process the Discussion Forum was indeed a success!

Planning of the Discussion Forum

Tai faces two challenges while conducting the Discussion Forum. The first challenge is to choose and plan for a topic in such a way that it unfolds before



children through various angles and to guide them to reach a higher understanding about the topic. The second challenge is to meet the expectation of choosing a topic that the children can relate to. Hence it is necessary to be flexible, yet well-organized in the planning for the Discussion Forum. Then alone the discussion can be fruitful and be prevented from going off-track. Let us look at an example -

Khelghar had many visitors in those days. We felt that talking with guests would be a great learning opportunity for children but the children were not interested in taking a break from their games and activities to talk to the guests. Mr. Tajima Toshio from Japan visited Khelghar for a month during this period. This guest who had come from a faraway land caught the children’s attention.

Tai decided to harness children’s curiosity about Mr. Tajima Toshio into the discussion topic, ‘How can we develop our capabilities so that we can have a good conversation with our guests?’ Tai planned for the session of the Discussion Forum as given below. There is a list of possible answers for every question. Tai created and kept this list handy so that she could suggest the points in case children didn’t answer.

Question – Why do you think guests visit Khelghar?

Responses – To see what Khelghar is

- As a part of their study
- As they are curious about Khelghar they want to know more about it.
- They want to donate to Khelghar in cash or kind
- They want to volunteer at Khelghar
- As invited experts to give us information about some topic
- For assessment and evaluation (especially by organizations that help Khelghar financially)

Question – What do we want to know from the guests and what would you like to tell them?

Responses - A new person brings along his experience, knowledge and culture. We should understand him and his background.

- Get information about his field
- Inform him about Khelghar’s work and its approach.
- Being able to tell openly, gently and politely if his behaviour is found to be unacceptable in any way.

¹ Festival of cobra worship

Question – What is the motive behind Tai’s conversation with the guests?

Responses –

- Connecting new people with Khelghar
- To get donations from them
- For promoting Khelghar
- Motivating them for social work
- Providing children with an opportunity to talk freely with new people
- Developing a proper outlook in their mind about children in the Basti.

Question – What questions should we ask from a perspective of learning?

1. Introduction and basic information

Response – Name, address, profession, education (what, how, where), marital status, children, type of work, daily routine etc.

2. Information about their country/region

Response – understand by locating on a map

- Weather, seasons, flora and fauna, crops, food habits, clothing, professions, culture, language, social life etc.
- Issues in their country – financial, social, geographical, political etc.

3. Understanding their thoughts and opinions.

Responses – How did they come to know about Khelghar?

- How did you feel after visiting us? Would you like to visit again?
- Would you like to work with Khelghar?
- Anything new that you might have understood about Khelghar?

Question – What can we tell them about Khelghar?

Responses – What do we do here?

- What is different here from the rest of the world?
- What are Khelghar’s features and positive things?
- What are the rules to be followed at Khelghar?

Question – What care should be taken while speaking with our guests?

Responses – speaking rudely, arrogantly, making fun,

A game that children at Khelghar enjoy

Children ask Tai a question and then Tai asks a question in return. The only rule is that everybody should answer frankly. This game is a wonderful tool to understand each other. It also helps to bring people from both sides of the table on the same page. Children have asked questions like, “Tai, if you are married why don’t you wear a bindi?”; “How much do you earn in a month?”; “Can you cook, Tai?” and many more.

This game can be played between teams of boys and girls. Or everybody can sit in a circle and everybody gets a chance to choose someone to answer their question. The person who answers gets the chance to ask the next question. It is a lot of fun. Many arguments end and disputes get resolved!

mocking them, or teasing should strictly not happen.

- We should greet them pleasantly.
- We should pay attention to them
- We should listen to them carefully and quietly
- They should feel happy about visiting Khelghar
- They should feel like visiting us again
- If we do not like something about their behaviour we should be able to express that politely.

A discussion with examples should follow. It is not necessary to be obsequious. We should talk to them in case we find their behaviour unacceptable.

Children will come up with some of these ‘possible responses’. Tai can ask leading questions to elicit the rest from the children or speak about them herself.

If we note down the discussion points during the session they can provide us direction for the next discussion.

These notes can also help other Tai/Dadas in future.

While Starting the Discussion Forum

Children need a gentle nudge to help them ease into the topic and participate in the discussion. Here are some ideas to make the conversation process interesting.

- Playing a game that can lead to a conversation around the topic
- Asking questions that lead to the topic
- Reciting content-rich songs in a rhythm, singing prayers, talking to the children about their meaning.
- Narrating a thought-provoking story or asking the children to complete a story.
- Picture story – exploring a story through pictures and speaking about it.
- ‘Show and Tell’ using some interesting object
- Through skits, role play and puppet shows
- Watching advertisements, cinema, documentaries and short films.
- By using content-rich and illustrated books.

Any resource that helps lead the children in the direction of the topic is useful for the Discussion Forum. It is especially useful to help younger children move from the concrete to the abstract.

Handling topics in the Discussion Forum

How does the Discussion Forum proceed? How does Tai direct the discussion? How do children participate? Let us understand the entire process through an example.

The topic for the Discussion Forum was ‘Relationship between children and adults’. The goal was to trigger a dialogue between children and adults, help children understand the issues and problems faced by adults and for adults to understand how children think.

We also wanted to develop a bond of understanding between Tai and the children. Through the discussion Tai wanted to clarify important aspects of relationships like understanding, trust, respect, cooperation and transparency.

It was difficult to talk about so many aspects in a single

Discussion Forum about ‘Freedom and Responsibility’ on the Khelghar terrace.



session. So, Tai decided to focus on and explore the aspect of ‘understanding’.

Tai had decided that her role would be to help the children to think but that she would strictly refrain from preaching and spoon-feeding answers. Everybody sat down in a circle. Tai said, “All of us will select one person from the group and will try to guess what is going on in his/her mind at this very moment. If the person actually feels the same way as we have guessed he/she will give us a thumbs-up else he/she will give a thumbs-down. There will be no discussion though.”

The guess work was quite interesting. “Rahul is wondering about the topic for the Discussion Forum today,” Mahesh guessed. Rahul gave a thumbs-down. “Mahesh must be thinking what he can say to impress everybody in the group.” Mahesh took slight offence to this accusatory tone and naturally gave a thumbs-down. “Soni must be thinking that this game is so difficult!”

Radha guessed. “Nope!” Soni quipped. Children had started to realize that we make a guess about what someone else is thinking based on what goes in our own mind and that it is indeed difficult to guess what the other person is thinking.

Suraj guessed, “Tai is feeling happy because all of us are participating.” Tai gave him a thumbs-up and in the same vein praised everybody and welcomed their participation. She told them about the topic for the discussion. She called upon them to discuss freely without any fear or doubt.

Her next question was, “There are many adults around you. What do you think about them?” It was a chance to understand children’s general opinion about adults. The initial opinions were positive - loving, responsible, disciplining, they help by explaining etc.

“Irascible” Mahesh started to express negative aspects. “Rageful, drunkards, beaters,” followed. “They insist that everything should happen the way they want”. “They don’t listen to children”. “They don’t have time”. “They punish us.” These were some of the opinions that

came forth. Tai wrote these on the blackboard.

“Let us choose one opinion from these and enact a situation that comes to our mind about it,” Tai suggested. A few boys came forward. “We are enacting older children who are chatting amongst themselves. There is a younger child who is listening to them keenly. Elder children speak with him angrily and in a contempt too. Later they drive him away.

Now it was girls’ turn. Laxmi assumed the role of their school teacher. “Who has completed the homework? Show it to me. You...you haven’t completed your homework? Go, go home and bring your parents!” “Sorry teacher, please excuse me this time, I will get it completed by tomorrow.” “No more excuses! Go right now and get your parents!” Laxmi’s perfect enactment of the teacher was well appreciated by the group. Sunil came up next in the role of another teacher. “How dare you disobey me!” He shouted and started to act as if he is hitting the child in front of him with gusto. Everyone


applauded. Tai realized that there was a lot of pent-up anger within children about their school teachers. She informed the children that it is illegal to punish children.

“I am going to lodge a complaint against this teacher at the police station. Then the police will teach him a lesson!” Kiran said. “Yeah right and then they will kick you out of the school.” Raju countered, “I know, it is not easy even if the law is on our side. The teacher holds a grudge even if someone answers back.”

Tai took over the reins of the conversation. “The law is necessary. That way, adults who punish children will at least understand that what they are doing is wrong. Some adults think

that it is their duty to punish children. Punishments will not stop just by making laws. The mindset of adults needs to change for that. They need to consider children with empathy.” Tai then introduced children to people and





“To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.”



Tony Robbins

organizations that consider children’s perspectives and rights, assertively put them in front of adults and work towards motivating adults to think – for example Palakneeti magazine, A-Bhay Abhiyaan and child-centric schools like Aksharnandan and Srujan Anand.

“Tai, Khleghar also considers children with empathy,” Rani quipped.

“Yes, we always strive for that. However, at Khelghar it is not sufficient for adults to be considerate towards children but children are also expected to be considerate towards adults. Our goal here is to understand each other.”

Tai continued, “Are the adults at Khelghar different from the adults outside Khelghar?” Children answered very enthusiastically. “Yes! They understand us.” “They make sure we understand, they never scold or hit us”. “They speak nicely”. “They help us”. Their answers proved how much they cared for Tai.

“All of this makes me feel very nice”, Tai continued,

“But I am aware that you disapprove of certain things that Tai does. You can speak openly and freely about that.” The discussion that followed was an eye-opener for us.

The group fell silent. Rahul ventured, “Tai, you behave very nicely with the children here in the group but you scolded the children who were making noise outside. Is that fair?” Tai felt a twinge of anger towards Rahul as he had pointed out her mistake but she also appreciated the accuracy with which he had pointed it out. “Their noise was distracting all of us. I tried to tell them nicely but they did not pay heed. That is what angered me.” Tai defended her actions. Rahul suggested, “You could have invited them inside to join our group Tai. We could all have tried to make them understand the problem.” Tai realized the



contradiction in her behaviour. How easily she had assumed control of the session while speaking about group work and group decisions on the other hand!

This incident strengthened children's trust for Tai and they started to speak more freely.

"Sometimes Tais speak harshly, they hurt our feelings," Atul said. "Why do you think that happens?" Tai asked. "Children make a lot of noise; they don't listen to what Tai says. What else can she do then?", Mangesh from ninth grade spoke up for the first time. "Nevertheless, she should control her temper, she should make children understand." Atul persisted. "If she keeps explaining patiently to every child what will the rest of the group do at that time? And how will she find the time to teach?", Mangesh countered. Tai intervened, "It is the responsibility of the entire group, not just Tai to create a quiet atmosphere that is conducive for learning. If a child is causing disturbance the entire group should discuss and come up with a solution."

Mahesh suggested, "We can tell the troublemakers that their actions are causing disturbance and ask them to behave. If they are bored they can do something else but refrain from disturbing the group. They can even leave if they wish to."

"If a child does not feel like learning then Tai can give him/her other interesting options."

"If some children are persistently disturbing the group we can take the issue up for discussion in the Discussion Forum. That way we can understand their problems, if any, and find solutions."

"If Tai scolds someone in front of the group then the child feels insulted. He does not feel like coming to Khelghar then. If he does not attend Khelghar how will he improve?"

The children were very sincere with their expressions. Tai was learning from them too. Mahesh said, "If Tai teaches well the children won't make a noise." Now Tai also started to feel angry. She realized that Tai's perspective needed to be taken up for discussion in the next session of the Discussion Forum. She started to wrap things up.

"We discussed the relationship between children and adults at length. The discussion is far from over. This is a good start. The discussion has made all of us realize many issues. We will discuss those issues in the next

session. Let us play a game, a variation of the game that we played at the start of the session. We will choose one child from the group and the rest will express what we have understood about that child through our discussion today."

Rahul was chosen unanimously. Tai wrote his name at the centre of the blackboard.

"Rahul expressed very nicely."

"He has started to think."

"There are many noticeable changes in Rahul."

"Rahul must be feeling quite pleased because the entire group is talking about him."

Many opinions were expressed. Rahul gave the group a proud thumbs-up. Tai's name came up next on the blackboard.

"You conducted the Discussion Forum very well today," said Sameer.

"It is late, almost 8 PM. Tai must be missing her home, her children. She must be eager to go home now."

"I was surprised when Tai accepted her mistake."

Tai was happy that the children were trying to understand her. She was overwhelmed. She gave everybody a thumbs up.

"We were together for a couple of hours. We tried to understand each other. It was tough in the beginning, but not quite so towards the end. We could reach out to each other easily. We should try to nurture this understanding."



Concluding the Session

The closing of the session of the Discussion Forum is as important as the beginning. It is important to review the group discussion before disengaging from the process of the Discussion Forum and redirecting the attention to other tasks. Hopefully, confusion should have given way to some clarity by now. Several questions can be posed towards the end of the session.

- 1) Express in one word what you feel after the discussion today.
- 2) What did you realize from the discussion today?
- 3) What topics can be considered for the next session of the Discussion Forum?
- 4) What did you like about the session today? What did you not like?

Children should leave the session with some specific words, thoughts or concepts in their mind.

Tai's Role

Tai's role is crucial. She faces multiple challenges such as eliciting participation from the children, encouraging them to think, holding their attention, sharing new information, changing her interaction with each child based on his/her level of understanding and issues and leading the discussion towards a positive direction.

Most adults are a product of an authoritative education system that discourages discussion. Hence, creative and interactive educational processes though acceptable to the intellect and the mind are difficult to internalize in practice. Tai should bring about a conscious change

within herself to be able to conduct the Discussion Forum effectively. The possibility of children responding with more understanding increases if Tai's participation is sincere, ardent and thorough.

The following points can be helpful in achieving this.

Change in the teacher's role

To conduct the Discussion Forum Tai needs to make a conscious shift from the role of a 'teacher' to that of a 'communicator'. It is generally assumed that the teacher teaches and the student learns. Hence the responsibility of decision-making in the classroom naturally lies with the teacher. In the classroom teachers are higher up in hierarchy than the students.

In the Discussion Forum the teacher needs to shed her superior role and be at the same level with the children. The same rules apply to everybody in the group. Tai's and the children's opinions have equal importance. If this approach is followed Tai's authority decreases but her responsibility increases and becomes more complex. Teachers are so accustomed to having more importance and receiving respect from the children that they may find it difficult to adopt an approach of giving importance and respect to children. Even if Tai disagrees with the children, feels contradicted or finds the children's opinions offensive she needs to lead by example, by listening to, understanding and trusting their expression. This is the first step towards a successful Discussion Forum.

Befriending the Children

The prerequisite for the Discussion Forum is that Tai should care for and love the children. Children need to be accustomed to and comfortable with Tai. Hence, it is better that Tai who is in daily association with the children conducts the Discussion Forum. Tai should plan for informal chit chat with the children in their daily routine.

These informal conversations go a long way in understanding children. Tai should keep a detailed log of the positive changes, capabilities and issues of the children.

A few simple actions can help to develop friendship between Tai and the children.

- Playing with abandon with the children, finding joy in it.



- Having no inhibitions about physical touch by the children.
- Sharing her experiences and emotions regarding children.
- Not hiding anything from children. If there is anything that you feel is inappropriate for sharing with children, it can be simplified and shared in a way that they will understand.
- Resolving conflicts and communicating things that you find bothersome.

In short, Tai needs to strive to reduce the barriers between her and the children.

A grip on the group process

Another attribute that is essential for Tai to develop is 'self-confidence'.

Self-confidence can be developed through study and practice. It also depends on the capability of Tai. She should be able to present her points in a way that children feel like listening to her and are interested in what she has to say. Skills such as listening carefully, speaking precisely, presenting points in such a way that each point has a logical connection to the next, citing relevant examples, verbal expression, sense of humour to keep the environment stress-free, acknowledging all the children while interacting, firm and timely curtailment of any conversation heading towards a fight and controlling emotional outbursts are essential for an effective dialogue.

Sometimes, children do not take Tai seriously. They ignore and disobey even simple instructions like taking turns to speak. Chaos ensues.

The session can fall apart. In such a situation Tai should take a sympathetic, yet firm stand. She should be able to command children's attention, remind them about the rules and impress upon them that she is trying to address them seriously. It is necessary to make the children aware that they must respect the rules of the Discussion Forum. Children usually cooperate after a reminder. Once they do, Tai should resume a friendly conversation by putting seriousness and anger aside.

There can be a difference between Tai's and the children's way of using the language. Tai should try to reduce usage of complicated words. She should explain the meaning of words that are suitable for the situation

but might not be understood by the children. She should accept the children's language and not consider their dialect as inferior.

Tai needs to make a conscious effort to cultivate communication skills within herself, to assess herself regularly and take measures for change. Let us consider this example.

During the initial stages of conducting the Discussion Forum One Tai felt that she was fumbling while trying to convey the points coherently. She decided to invest more effort in the planning of the Discussion Forum. She chalked out the entire plan – the start, the expansion, the summing up of the session and how she could navigate through various points. She also made a list of questions she could ask and possible responses from the children. She thought of examples from her own life relating to the value that she wanted to convey. She practiced hard to make her point simple and to convey it precisely. After such a rigorous preparation she naturally could immerse herself thoroughly into the session of the Discussion Forum. The children also participated sincerely and with interest. Many new points were brought up in the discussion.

Tai was pleased with the result of her efforts. It motivated her and gave a boost to her future preparatory efforts.

Information and References

Tai needs to be aware of the political and social events happening around. Newspapers are wonderful tools for this. For example, newspaper cuttings about 'Child punishment abolishment laws' proved to be invaluable for the session about 'Punishment and children'. It is recommended that Tai follows magazines that focus on topics such as social movements, education and parenting.

The internet is a treasure trove of excellent material. Obtaining information is the first step but reflecting on that information is also important. We can gain clarity about a topic by analysing information, applying it to our experience and by discussing our thoughts with others. It is essential for the facilitator to have clarity about various issues and topics.

Triggering the thoughts

We have many questions that bother us but we don't prioritize addressing those in the daily grind of life. However, we should not ignore these questions. We should try to find clarity about the issues that matter in our personal and professional life. We should prioritize self-reflection, writing and discussions with friends, family and peers. This gives us clarity at least for that moment of time. That in turn fuels our struggle for life. We can even make a weekly list of the new things that we understand – much like a grocery list! This gives us clarity and joy.

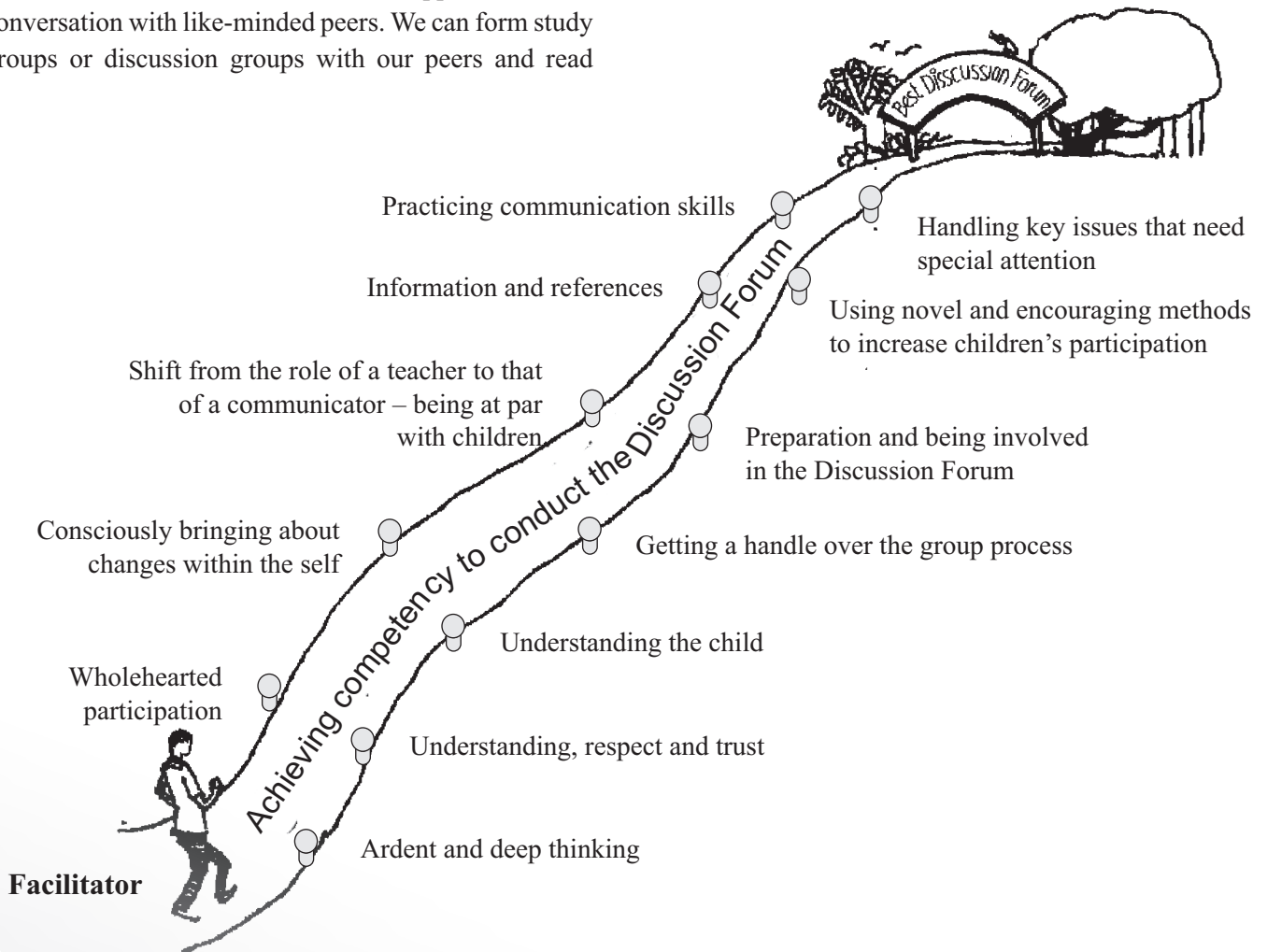
Practicing Communication Skills

Participating in study sessions and discussion groups organized by various organizations and social movements helps to achieve clarity of thoughts and to present them succinctly. To improve our communication with children it is to search for opportunities of conversation with like-minded peers. We can form study groups or discussion groups with our peers and read

relevant books within the group. If the planning, assessment and the decision making of the organization is conducted as a group process Tai can find many opportunities for conversation. Such conversations help us to converse openly, frankly and thus prove meaningful through our thought process.

Being engaged with the Discussion Forum

Tai needs to reserve some time so that she can prepare herself to conduct the session effectively. Tai has many preoccupations. She might not always have the energy and the compassionate mindset required to conduct the Discussion Forum. Hence, she should free herself physically and mentally of all other tasks and chores at least 10-15 minutes before the session to attain a required level of calmness. She should reserve this time before the actual session after she has completed the preparations, planning and organization required for the session. This



is very useful to enable her to engage effectively with the Discussion Forum session.

How does Tai benefit through the Discussion Forum?

Conducting a session of the Discussion Forum is undoubtedly challenging for Tai. The usually neglected task of bringing a change in the self comes to the forefront in this process. She may face disappointment and confusion. Being involved with the Discussion Forum shapes Tai's personality. It can prove to be a significant step towards self-development for her. She gains the opportunity to develop as a patient, communicative, holistic and thinking person. Since Tai has the highest involvement with the Discussion Forum, naturally, she is the one who receives the maximum opportunities for developing communication skills from the process. This is an indescribable joy of self-development. Words cannot do it justice; it needs to be experienced.

Points that need special attention in the Discussion Forum

The process that takes place within the group of 15-20 children and one or two Tais at the Discussion Forum is quite interesting. If Tai is aware of the key issues that need special attention then she can deal better with situations that might crop up unexpectedly. Every participant has the need to be accepted and get importance in the group. If this need is not satisfied children react according to their attitude and disposition in one of the three ways given below.

1) Reducing interaction and disengaging from the group



2) Trying every possible way to attract attention of the group

3) Trying to disrupt the group

We label such behaviour as 'indisciplined'. Tai can adopt various measures to prevent children's behaviour from reaching this stage. To do so, it is necessary to understand why children behave in such a manner. Some reasons for such behaviour are related to their personal experiences and some to their experiences in the group. Though we have given a general guideline to handle such situations Tai should find ways, make suitable decisions and align her process according to the need of the moment. She can find solutions by having a conversation with the children in the Discussion Forum.

Children who do not participate actively in the group

There are multiple reasons for a child to remain passive in the group.

Children face discrimination at home and in the society based on the colour of their skin, their intellect, personality, caste, religion and gender. These experiences shape their personality. Such intense experiences occurring frequently damage their self-esteem.

Almost everybody in the group has faced an inferior treatment at some point or the other. Khelghar should provide a nurturing atmosphere for everyone to find and accept herself and to strive for positivity.

- Some children cannot participate as their basic skills necessary for participation such as listening, speaking and being patient are not developed well enough.

- Some children are afraid of overbearing children in the group. They fear ridicule, their mistakes being pointed out and being blamed in the group. They prefer to be quiet because of such fears.

Children themselves form rules through discussion to ensure a positive atmosphere in the group. For example, "I will not cause trouble and will not tolerate ill treatment from anybody." Tai should remind the children of these rules that they themselves have created and conduct a discussion on them.

- If children are tired from physical work, are disturbed or restless due to their involvement in a fight or any insulting incidents, are anxious about homework, or are

A conversation that failed

A few years ago, Khelghar organized a study tour of all its volunteers to Vardha. We visited 'Anand Niketan', a school that runs on Gandhiji's Nayi Taleem principles. The speciality of this school is learning through the medium of activities such as gardening, cooking, cleaning, spinning yarn and stitching.

The children were very eager and ready for any kind of work. At the same time they were also willing to sit quietly and listen. We were amazed by this magic that was unfolding without resorting to any punishment or pressure. Our conversations were constantly dominated by comparisons between Khelghar's children and the children we saw there - "Our children don't sit in one place at all.", "Our children don't like to work.", and so on.

We had a session of the Discussion Forum scheduled the very day we returned to Pune. Our priority was to discuss the school we had just visited. Unknowingly, we failed to think about what the children's priority was. After the children had settled down they started to listen to what Tai was enthusiastically sharing with them. They appreciated the children at Anand Niketan for a while.

"No punishment? And still the children sit quietly? That's magic!"

"Their parents must be very well-behaved. They must not be fighting at home."

"These children are indeed different!"

Children started to express their opinions. We started comparing the Khelghar children with the children at Anand Niketan. "We feel very disappointed at times. You don't volunteer to do any kind of work, you don't sit and listen quietly, you make noise....". Such remarks from Tai resulted in children losing interest in the discussion. They started to chat with each other. A few got up to leave.

The session was a failure! Tai was quite upset. We discovered some very valuable insights about conducting the Discussion Forum when we reviewed this session with our volunteers.

- The Discussion Forum is not a place to preach.
- Preaching does not lead to change.
- Children feel insulted when they are compared with other children
- Since children are not powerful enough to oppose Tai directly they resort to creating chaos, playing tricks if they disagree with the allegations made against them. It is their way of showing their anger towards Tai. Conversation stops.

Tai of course knew all about this. Preaching and practicing are indeed two very different things!

depressed due to any personal reasons then they might not participate actively in the group.

- There can be some other possibilities about a silent and shy child. This child could be thoughtful. She might be thinking deeply about the issues under discussion. So, it might not be possible for her to reach a conclusion and

present it to the group immediately. She might be experiencing a conflict between her thoughts and those presented by others in the group. In such a situation, Tai can suggest the child to keep a notepad and a pencil with her. The child can pen down her thoughts during the session. Others can acknowledge her thoughts at the end

of the session. Tai might also realize some new aspects during a personal discussion with children after the session is over. It can be beneficial to include such children in the planning for the Discussion Forum.

- The child's temperament can play a role in her quiet, non-participatory or attention seeking behaviour. Changing one's temperament is not an easy task. It can be done but such changes take time. Change can occur only if the person has understood the need for change and is making conscious efforts for the same. Tai should adopt the approach of 'wait and watch' in such situations.

Children displaying attention seeking behaviour

Children adopt various means to attract attention and seek importance in the group.

- They express an opinion on each and every issue raised by Tai. They constantly want to answer and talk to Tai but when they do, their answers are quite incongruent with the issue being discussed. Other children in the group neither get an opportunity to speak nor the peace and quietness for thinking about the issue at hand. The discussion might go astray. Tai can make the bothersome children sit near her and signal them with her hand to wait for a while. She can suggest something like, "You have had many opportunities to speak, try listening for some time," through her body language or by her touch. If this conversation takes place between Tai and the child the group does not get distracted and the child also does not feel insulted in front of the group.

- Some children ignore what they feel and instead try to say something that they think Tai will appreciate or expect. Tai may find these children supportive for taking the discussion ahead and they naturally might get more chances to speak during the discussion. Other children resent these children. They carefully observe and point out the difference in what these children do and what they say. What should Tai do then?

Even if Tai realizes that a child is not speaking her mind but is speaking to please Tai, the point the child is making is important for the discussion. It helps to bring forward some positive and thoughtful aspects for discussion. The child who raises the point might not be behaving in accordance with what she says but it can be considered as a start in a positive direction. The possibility of these

thoughts reflecting in her actions has definitely increased. Despite of all this the child should be asked questions about her behaviour. If other children protest against her behaviour then it is also a sign of their awareness. Since the protest arises from the group it makes Tai's role easier. The discussion that follows is useful to take the group discussion ahead. However, Tai should strictly remember not to treat this child in any special way.

- Some children have a well-developed ability of understanding and communication. So they can grasp the point quickly and want to present their opinion immediately. These children help to take the discussion ahead but sometimes their participation is counterproductive for the group process.

If the conversation is limited to this child and Tai the rest of the children disengage and can even leave the session. The challenge faced by Tai here is to increase the child's interaction with the rest of the group without making her feel snubbed. Tai can entrust such children with tasks



such as noting down important points, writing main points on the blackboard, helping her with the planning of the session and encourage them to present opposing points. This has the effect of giving due importance to the child in the group and since she has a specific task she remains quiet too. These children need to work on their restraint, listening, patience, thinking about various dimensions of an issue and speaking succinctly. They might be willing to work on it if Tai nudges them in the right direction.

Mixed gender groups

Children feel a strong attraction for a person of opposite sex around the age of 12-13 years. Trying to make an impression on a person of opposite gender uses up a lot of their energy. Their behaviour is influenced by the prevailing norms of beauty and style. For example, boys start to behave in a macho and carefree manner while girls begin to behave shyly and coyly.

This attraction takes a strong hold on children's minds in a society that restricts interaction between girls and boys. An open discussion about physical and mental changes that occur naturally with age, the natural differences in their bodies, and gender awareness goes a long way to help children to learn to set mutual attraction aside and participate in the Discussion Forum. The Discussion Forum should include topics such as the difference between 'looking good' and 'being good', 'relationships and the values therein' and the prevalent notions about them.



Children who try to disrupt the group

- Children who arrive late and attract attention by speaking or trying to impress others.
- Not participating in the group, constantly passing comments and cracking jokes.
- Signaling and teasing other children in the group without Tai's awareness.
- Leaving the group abruptly to go to the bathroom or to drink water.
- Unabashedly displaying boredom.

These children influence other children very easily with their behaviour. They are quite capable of disrupting the Discussion Forum. Tai may feel resentment towards such children. She naturally thinks that they should be ousted from the group but these children can disrupt the group even from outside. It is necessary to understand that these children desire to be a part of the Discussion Forum but they do not receive enough acceptance or importance from the group and hence they resort to disruptive behaviour. What should Tai do?

- Make an effort to understand these children, try to see their positive traits.
- Have a private conversation with the child about her behaviour and the problems caused due to it without getting angry.
- Call upon them to change and provide opportunities for change.
- Acknowledge their baby steps towards positive change.
- Hand over some responsibilities of the group to them
- Try to impress upon them through her own behaviour that they are accepted in the group.

A powerful medium such as the Discussion Forum is essential not only for underprivileged children but also for all children in all strata of the society. A weekly Discussion Forum between children and adults in homes, schools, organizations can go a long way for overall development.

A short film of about 20 minutes on the topic of the Discussion Forum is available on YouTube at - https://youtube/94_cc59jo51



Dos and Don'ts for the Discussion Forum

- Sit in a circle, provide comfortable seating.
- The Discussion Forum should be conducted by someone who is in regular contact with the children.
- The facilitator should be friendly with the children. Respect and trust are very important.
- Initiate the Discussion Forum with topics that children can easily relate to.
- The facilitator should include experiences and examples from her personal life to make the discussion interesting while ensuring that the discussion does not digress.
- Do not use the Discussion Forum to scold, preach or instruct children.
- Ridicule, mockery and insults are prohibited in the Discussion Forum.
- There should be an easy shift from 'Teacher' to 'Facilitator'.
- The atmosphere should be free, there should be no fear. The facilitator should ensure that everybody is involved and participating heartily.
- Children's merits should be appreciated in the discussion but their mistakes should not be pointed out in front of others.
- There should be absolutely no comparison between children. Efforts should be taken to avoid contemptuous and scornful behaviour.
- Everybody should participate in the discussion. Taking turns one-by-one in the circle to speak, motivating shy children to talk and encouraging the ones who lag behind are some ways to elicit participation from the group.
- If a child chooses to be quiet, that should also be accepted. Do not force the child to talk.
- Do not become anxious if the question asked is not answered by anyone. Silence is important for the discussion! That is when thoughts emerge.
- The facilitator has the responsibility of deciding the topic, listing points based on the expanse of the topic and guiding the discussion. But she should also allow for some leeway for spontaneity and flexibility to include – or at least not to avoid - other important points in the discussion.
- Sometimes, children point out the facilitator's mistakes during the discussion. They can harshly point out discrepancies in her behaviour and speech. The facilitator might feel angry when it occurs. At this point, the process of listening calmly, thinking, accepting one's mistake if any, and if necessary, explaining the other side of the coin that the child might have missed is essential. It is quite a challenging feat! But at the same time it is a proof that Tai has been successful in creating an open atmosphere in the Discussion Forum. If Tai feels that she cannot control her anger it is best to suggest that the point can be taken up later for discussion.
- Tai and the children have an excellent opportunity to increase patience, humility and compassion.

Facing Challenges

It is a challenge not to abide by prevalent systems and customs. It needs the development of the ability to find positive ways and to think rationally. Such a person is 'free' in the truest sense. She possesses independent thought, emotions and inspiration. She can make her life and everything that she is involved in beautiful. Khelghar aspires to develop abilities that can help a person to reach this level of self-sufficiency. The current schooling system, especially the typical schools that underprivileged children have access to, are far from providing education that can help to achieve this goal. Conversely, the negative experiences obtained in the school distance the children from real-life learning. They despise their school, their teachers, the textbooks and exams.

Khelghar believes that real learning is beyond reproducing information as-is from the textbooks in the exams. When a child connects this information to her experiences and pre-existing knowledge, feels something through the process, wants to take some action on it and understands something out of it then we can say that a cycle of learning is complete. Let us look at an example.

Ratna, an eighth grader at Khelghar lost her mother due to suicide resulting out of constant fights between the parents. Ratna had three elder sisters and a younger brother. The eldest sister was married and the other two sisters were engaged to be married. The father wanted to remarry immediately; else he would have had to wait for another three years as per the custom. Ratna was against this marriage. The new couple also considered living with the teenage daughters as an inconvenience. Hence, Ratna was to be sent to live with her grandmother in the village. The secondary school was far from the village and Ratna would have had to work in the house and farm as well. Tai guessed that Ratna's education would get discontinued.

Everybody at Khelghar wanted Ratna's education to continue. She herself was keen to study and was willing to take all the required efforts. Tai put forth an option of enrolling her in a residential school. She discussed what that would entail and what changes Ratna would need to make in herself. Ratna tried to forgive her father for remarrying and accepted his second marriage. She also tried to get along with her stepmother. She cried and even went on a fast to put an end to the family's plan of sending her to her grandmother. Tai put in many efforts to get Ratna enrolled in a residential girl's school in Pune.

There was much paperwork to be produced and many fruitless trips to the office involved. A note from the corporator was needed. Despite of all these difficulties Tai was inspired to do this for Ratna's future. The residential school had a policy of admitting only the outstation girls but Tai met the concerned officials, produced them a letter from Khelghar and got Ratna enrolled in the residential school.

Ratna was very cooperative. She sincerely worked to complete tasks such as getting a certificate from her previous school, taking her father to meet the corporator, being in touch with Tai and standing in queues for official work. Tai was able to secure a donation for Ratna's academic fees. Khelghar also supported her financially. Her father opposed the idea at first but gave in when he realized that Khelghar was taking the responsibility for her enrolment and that the problem of having Ratna at home would be automatically resolved. After she completed tenth grade, her father decided that she had to get married. Ratna had to give in to the pressure of society and tradition but those two years taught her a lot. It has surely helped her face life with confidence and self-respect.

The situation was so complex that any person or organization would have easily conceded defeat. But Tai and Ratna through their pro-active decisions were able to overcome the circumstances at least to some extent.



Khelghar



Discussion Forum

**KHELGHAR
for the Development
of Life Skills**

Special Programmes





8

Exploring Oneself ...

"Where the mind is without fear
and the head is held high,
where knowledge is free.

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls.

Where words come out from the depth of truth,
where tireless striving stretches its arms toward perfection

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way.

Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit.

Where the mind is led forward by thee
into ever widening thought and action.

In to that heaven of freedom, my father,

LET MY COUNTRY AWAKE!"

- Rabindranath Tagore, Gitanjali



Knowing others is
wisdom.
Knowing self is
enlightenment !

- Lao Tzu



Exploring oneself

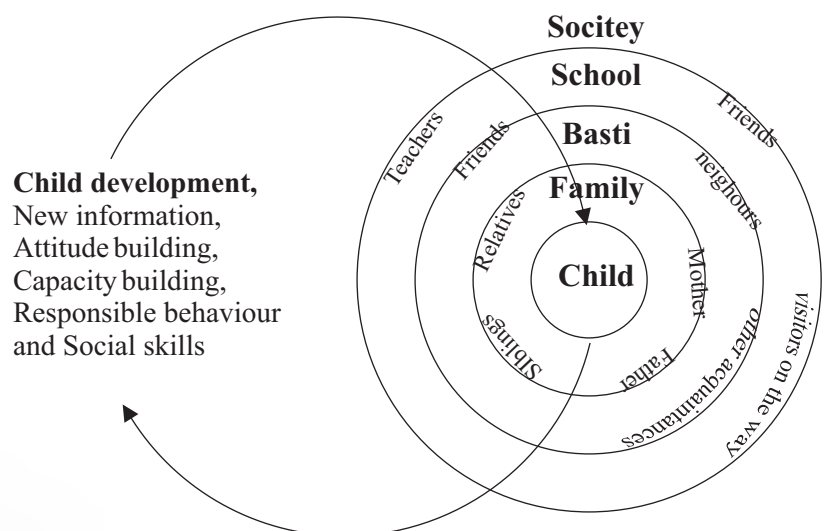
Khelghar must consciously consider the development of necessary life skills to make the day to day life a source of joy. 'Exploring oneself' is one such module developed by Khelghar. This module covers information pertaining to the subject, necessary components for attitude building and programmes to be conducted with children. Khelghar has also developed modules on 'my family', 'my basti', 'my environment', 'towards gender equality' etc.

Thinking about oneself is something we do spontaneously and naturally. It is easily done and we all like to think about ourselves. We have therefore given detailed information regarding the module "Exploring oneself" in this chapter.

It is through self-exploration that we try to become a better person and through these efforts that we start gaining self-confidence. 'Self-confidence' has to be built and nurtured. A person who is confident about himself/herself does not rely on compliments from others. Such a person has the innate strength to face any challenge that is thrown at him/her.

The deprived class of children we work with have to often face insults on three fronts: home, school and society. There is a strong possibility that such circumstances may demoralise them. That is why it becomes extremely important to take them on a journey of self-exploration.

Our consciousness and thoughts always begin with the 'I'. What is the process of the development of this 'I'? When we are growing up, we keep hearing people's comments about us. For example, "girls should not behave in such a way" or "she is quite average looking, but is not bad in her studies", etc. As a result of such comments are born feelings of love, fear, stress that unknowingly improve or tarnish our self-image. Our module



“Exploring oneself” aims to make children aware of the fact that “I can think for myself and can consciously build my image the way I deem appropriate”. We need to become their companions on this path to a better life. This work will also help us to discover ourselves. And that’s a bonus!

In order to achieve the intended goals for the development of the children (as shown in the diagram), they themselves need to have a clear understanding of their likes-dislikes, their feelings and their priorities. For this, they need to develop a dialogue with themselves. So as to nurture this ability, they need to bring about changes in themselves and take responsibility for their choices. At Khelghar, we therefore believe that the development of life skills should begin with exploring oneself. We realise that when you work on this topic with

children, a little older than third or fourth grade, they tend to think more freely. Children often unconsciously think about themselves. But now these thoughts need to be channelized and moulded. Each child needs to realise certain things about himself/herself through the proposed activities and the discussions based on those activities. Let us begin with information about ourselves and gradually move towards our feelings and abilities.

1) About myself: Objective

- Being able to introduce myself to others without stumbling.
- Being able to give my address with landmarks and to find my way home
- Beginning to understand what my geographical, social and economic place is in the existing social

Table 1: Increasing the scope of "Information about myself" according to age groups

No.	Stage 1 (Std 1-3)	Stage 2 (Std 4-6)	Stage 3 (Std 7-8)
1	Being able to tell name, age etc.	Being able to tell date of birth	Being able to calculate own age based on date of birth.
2	Being able to tell own address.	Being able to understand my international address.	Being able to understand my address - the Solar system - the concept of the Universe.
3	Being able to gather information such as name, age, work etc. about parents	Being able to gather information about own native place, language, siblings	Being able to gather information about own caste, religion, language, income etc.
4	Being able to gather information about my brothers and sisters, friends and pet animals.	Being able to gather information about my siblings, friends and pet animals.	Being able to understand and give information about behavioural traits.
5	Being able to gather information such as the name and address of the school.	Being able to gather information about whether it is a private / public school, its timings and the medium of instruction.	Being able to discuss the school’s features such as whether it is aided/non-aided and also its good and bad points.
6	Being able to describe my daily routine.	What changes my daily routine. Being able to discuss topics such as incidents at home, exams, holidays etc.	What changes my daily routine Being able to discuss topics such as festivals, weddings, guests, quarrels, illnesses, other serious issues etc.
7	My history Being able to gather information about events that took place during childhood.	Being able to understand the ‘time-line’ of events in my life.	Pondering over important events from my past, my present and those that are likely to happen in my future.
8	Being able to gather information about my family.	Being able to discuss the connection between caste, religion, language, native place etc. and my situation and its consequences.	Being able to accept own situation and to discuss how I can bring about changes in myself to improve this situation.

system and what its connection to my existence is.

- Recognizing the links between my current existence and the past events of my life.

Let us have a look at some of the activities proposed in the section ‘About myself’.

My address

‘Where do you stay?’ This is one of the questions with which introductions begin! Me - my house - my basti - my town. Understanding this ever increasing scope of information about myself from a geographical point of view, makes it far more interesting. Let us take the example of a girl from Khelghar -

Jyoti Parvati Sakharam Govande

Laxminagar Basti

Kothrud, Pune 411029

Third and fourth grade children should know their addresses to this extent. Ask them to prepare a card containing their addresses and their phone numbers as well as that of Khelghar. After wrapping them in plastic covers, children up to the fourth grade should always carry this card with them. Activities like locating ‘the town where I reside’ and ‘my native town’ on a map, help us introduce children to maps as well as to their own address.

Towards an universal address

From ‘my address’ to the Solar system:

1) **My house** - ask each child to draw a rough map of his/her basti and to locate his/her house on it.

2) **Laxminagar** - show the children a map of Pune. Point out the different localities: Kothrud, Shivajinagar, Pashan, etc. and explain to them that ‘Laxminagar’ is a part of Kothrud. You can also find the map with the help of Google Earth.

3) **Taluka, district, state, country** - now show them four different maps, one each of the Haveli Taluka, the District of Pune, the State of Maharashtra and India. Explain to them how each element forming the chain is linked to the other elements, for example: the state of Maharashtra has several districts, one of which is Pune. Pune has several localities, one of which is Kothrud. Kothrud has different areas, one of which is Laxminagar. Laxminagar has several houses, one of which is mine.

4) **The Asian continent & the Earth** - at this stage,

show them the globe and the world map. Expand the links of the previous chain starting from the Asian continent leading up to the World.

5) **The Universe** - children above the eighth grade should be able to go beyond the earth, up to the Solar system and even the Universe.

So, Jyoti Govande’s universal address will be as follows:

Laxminagar, Kothrud, Pune City,

Taluka Haveli, Maharashtra State, India, Asia

the World (Earth), the Solar system, the Universe.

Children love to repeat this chain, from home to the Universe and from the Universe back to home!

My circumstances

Why do I need to know “my information”?

It is basically required in order to ‘Introduce oneself or fill up a form’. Beyond this, it is important to understand how each element of this information affects my life today.

My life and my being are controlled by two things:

- 1) My circumstances
- 2) The efforts I take to change the negative things in it.

My circumstances include -

- my gender
- the number of siblings I have
- my religion/caste
- the education and profession of my parents and their financial condition
- the place where I was born and whether or not it is developed, its geographical features etc.

Due to the circumstances in which we are born, we encounter some good and some difficult situations. Growing up, our progress or decline depends on such circumstantial elements. For example, if a girl is born in an Adivasi family in a remote region, she may experience a very special kind of freedom and liberty; but on the other hand, she may have very limited rights, opportunities and facilities. If, however, a boy is born in a city based well-to-do ‘upper-caste’ family, though he may become an indolent spoiled child, he still has access to a lot of good opportunities. In order to understand the concept of unequal opportunities, the Tai/Dada working

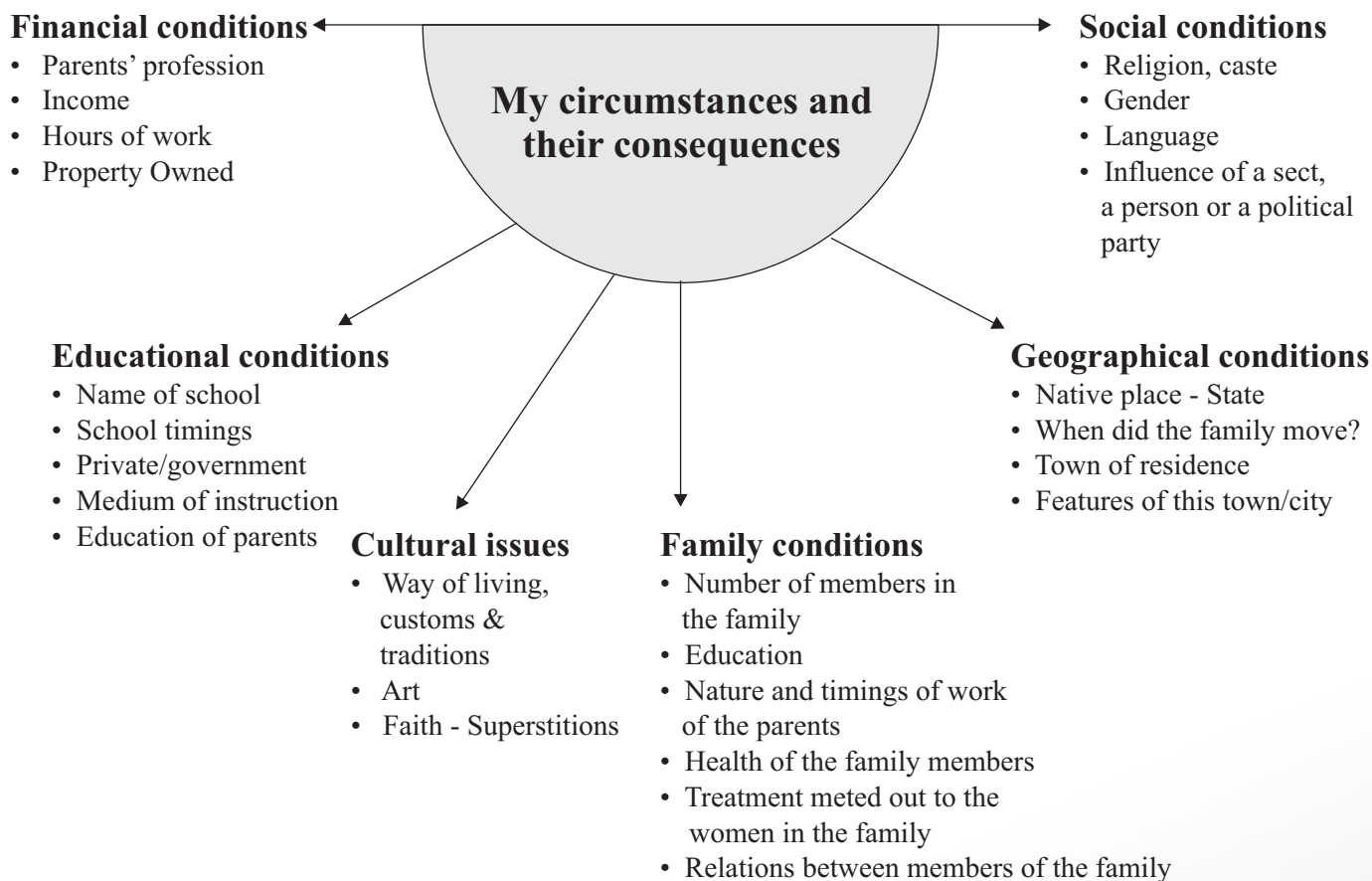
at Khelghar should have sound knowledge of the existing social circumstances. He/she should be aware of the history of how inequalities based on religion, caste, gender and class came into existence. He/she should also be aware of the initiatives and movements that have happened against the exploitation and injustice of this system. Equipped with this information, children will be more willing to bring about changes in their circumstances. The activities mentioned below will help motivate them.

So that the children understand the good and bad consequences of their circumstances on their lives, ask the high school children of Khelghar to fill in the chart given below. Once they have filled in details of their circumstances, have a discussion about their consequences. Then ask them to note down all the points in their notebooks.

The discussion that is triggered should give them the confidence that if they are determined and make an

effort, they can bring about changes in their lives. You can give them examples of people who have put in efforts to change their difficult situations. Likewise, you can also cite the example of their parents. “Our parents changed themselves and we reaped the benefits. Their decision to leave the village and come to town had some good and some bad impacts on their lives and on ours too. So whatever changes we bring about in our lives now, will have an impact on our future.” Such discussions should help motivate the children to face their circumstances and to come up with possible actions for bringing about change.

Here it is essential to follow one rule: Tai must never make the mistake of criticising them by saying things like: ‘you are lazy, you don’t wish to study, you just want to roam around.’ She should not insist on the children recounting what exactly they plan on doing next either. She only has to get them to see what all they can possibly do. What to do next is best left to them!



My history

Children should ideally be introduced to history starting with their own past. It can be a very enriching experience. The main purpose of learning history is to establish a link between the past and the present. Children need to understand that present circumstances have their roots in the past. This will make it easier for them to understand the potential consequences of their present behaviour in the future.

One important tool for learning history is the “Time-line”.

This line traces the time from one’s birth till date. Ask the children to now jot down the main events of their lives on this line.

For example: the birth of younger brother, the day father went out of town, the year of passing fifth grade exam etc. The children need to get this information from their parents. They also need to write down how each of these events affected their lives. For example, after my younger brother was born, I had someone to play with, although I didn’t get as much attention anymore from my mother etc. This time-line helps us to understand ourselves better.

The Time-line of a ninth grade girl at Khelghar

Event	Year	Consequence
My birth in Parbhani	2000	Since I was the first child and that too a girl, family members were disappointed.
Birth of the younger brother	2002	Got a playmate but also less attention, I was now considered as a grown-up child.
Birth of the younger sister	2004	Had to start looking after my brother.
Started school	2006	Loved school. Made a lot of friends.
Family moved to Pune	2008	Change, chaos, financial strain, TV, quarrels at home, new surroundings etc.
Father’s drinking became more habitual	2010	Quarrels and violence at home, both increased.
Mother started going out for work	2011	Financial strain, increased disputes, the expectation to do more housework.
Joined Khelghar	2012	Was happy, had fun and made new friends.
A close friend died	2013	Felt lonely but had support from my mother and from the Tai at Khelghar.
Entered high school.	2014	Went to a co-ed school, made friends with both boys and girls, was more confused.
Entered class nine	2015	Was stressed about my studies. Did not get enough time to study because of the burden of housework

After completing this step, the children can understand more about ‘my family history’ with the help of the elders in their family. Finding out the history of my basti, my town or village can also reveal a lot of things. At this stage, you can further develop the module by associating it with geography. The context of the current events can be understood through history and this in turn can help build an overall understanding of the circumstances.

2) My body

“Health” is one of the important components of life skills education. However, the discussion on this subject has been split into parts in this handbook. Please do refer to the section on “Discussion about Health” in this book. It is through our body that we experience so many different things in life, we learn, we work etc. If the body is healthy and strong, then we can live a happy, meaningful life. If we know our body well, then we can take good care of it. And if the body is ailing, then we can seek suitable treatment. Without understanding human physiology we cannot get rid of harmful superstitions. The purpose of understanding the human body is not merely to obtain information. Discussing topics freely such as the shame associated with certain parts of our body, the use of phrases or abusive words referring to body parts etc. can help us accept our body with an open mind and also

rectify any wrong notions that we may have. Understanding the male and female body is an important element in sexuality education. “My Body” is a very important component of the present module. However, owing to insufficient information on certain activities, it may appear somewhat incomplete. You could get this information in the material published by organisations that have been referenced.

In this part, we can think about the body in the following three ways:

1. Structure of the body: various parts of the body, their functions, different body systems and their interrelationships.
2. Health education: cleanliness, diet, illnesses and the care to be taken in these matters.
3. Appearance or the way I look

	Stage 1 (Std. 1 to 3)	Stage 2 (Std. 4 to 6)	Stage 3 (Std. 7 to 8)
Objective	To discover the names of external organs and their functions. To discover the experience related to sensory organs	To discover the external and internal organs and their functions. To further develop the experience related to sensory organs. To learn about the different systems in the body, e.g. respiratory, digestive and excretory systems, etc.	To discover the external and internal organs, their functions and interdependence. To further develop the experience related to sensory organs. To learn about the different systems in the body and their interrelationship, e.g. the relationship between the respiratory system and blood circulation system
Activities	1. Using charts, match pairs of the names and pictures of external organs and their functions.	Write down the names and functions of internal as well as external organs. Obtain information about the digestive and excretory systems.	Write the names and functions of internal as well as external organs on the board. Obtain information about the respiratory and blood circulation systems.
	2. Ask a child to lie down on a large drawing sheet and draw an outline of his body. Then, proceed to naming the external body parts.	Locate and name the different internal organs on the outline of the body drawn on the drawing sheet. Describe their functions.	With the help of different charts, discuss information about the digestive, excretory, respiratory and blood circulation systems.
	3. Make impressions of your own fingers and palms, examine them and draw pictures using them.	Draw and name the different systems of the body in the outline drawn.	Draw the different systems of the body in the outline drawn and learn about their interrelationships. You can also solve puzzles and riddles based on the internal organs.
Games	Simon says: Run Simon says: Show your left hand etc.	The ‘What if’ game: 1) What if I do not cut my nails? 2) What if I do not wear footwear? etc.	The ‘What if’ game: 1) What if I pinch my nose? 2) What if I fast for eight days?

Cleanliness

	Stage 1 (Std. 1 to 3)	Stage 2 (Std. 4 to 6)	Stage 3 (Std. 7 to 8)
Objective	Personal hygiene. Understand the importance of wearing footwear (chappals).	Cleanliness of clothes. Genital hygiene.	Cleanliness at home and in our surroundings. Menstrual hygiene.
Activities	1) Conduct a practical demonstration of bathing.	Make a hygiene kit for Khelghar (Comb, nail cutter, handkerchief, napkin, toothbrush, and paste).	Educate girls and boys about menstruation. Talk to them openly about superstitions, right and wrong beliefs about menstruation etc. Explain the use of sanitary pads.
	2) Conduct a practical demonstration of how to keep your teeth, nails, hands, eyes, ears and hair clean. Teach them to keep daily records of the same.	Conduct a practical demonstration of how to wash, dry and fold clothes and stitch torn clothes.	Understanding how cleanliness, tidiness and beauty are all linked together.
	3) Apply gamma benzene to treat the problem of lice in the hair of all the boys and girls. Get them into the habit of adding camphor tablets to coconut oil.	With the help of the 'What if' game, make them realise the importance of maintaining hygiene of the sex organs.	Going to one of their friends' house and voluntarily contributing to clean it. With their permission, cleaning the bathroom and the kitchen too.

Diet Tri Color Diet



Sketches taken with thanks from 'Savalitiya Goshthi'

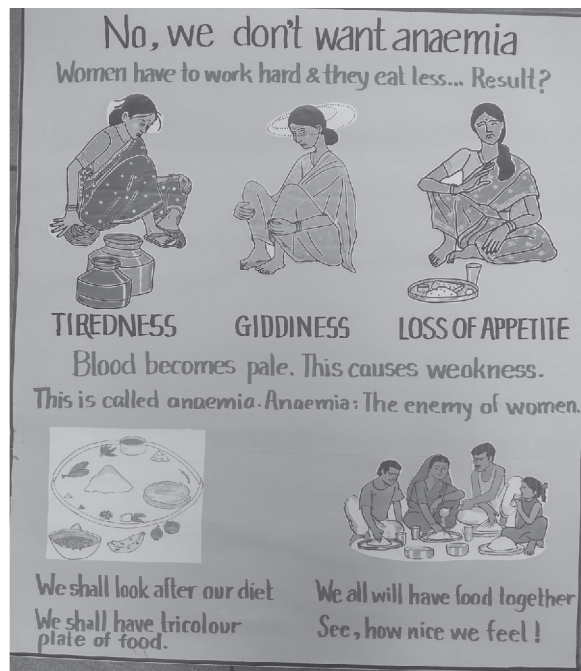
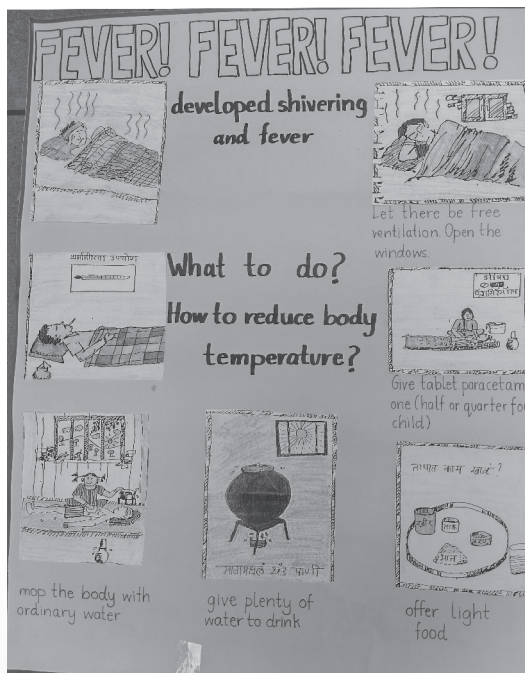
Posters made by Tais and Dadas of Khelghar

Diet

	Stage 1 (Std. 1 to 3)	Stage 2 (Std. 4 to 6)	Stage 3 (Std. 7 to 8)
Objective	To think about ‘Why do we need to eat?’	To identify the nutrients in the children’s diets.	To identify what stops us from having a balanced and nutritious diet.
	To discuss what is good for our health and what is not.	To understand the nutrients obtained from food and their benefits.	To examine the beliefs about fasting.
	To discuss concepts like strength and stamina, growth and development.	To understand the science underlying the importance of cleanliness in the kitchen.	To understand the harm caused by consuming cold drinks, to understand the commercial aspects behind it and to seek alternatives.
	To understand the importance of hygiene in the context of food.	To have a discussion on the objectives of strength and stamina, growth and development.	To gain information about food adulteration. To understand the harmful effects of addictions.
Activities	1) Prepare a chart of what you eat throughout the day. Identify the different grains and vegetables.	Discuss how the pocket money is used to buy snacks and the nutrients we get from them.	Discuss the harmful effects of consuming ready-made junk foods.
	2) Discuss the difference between homemade and purchased snacks.	Draw a meal (thali) consisting of tri color foods (red, yellow, green) and discuss the nutritional value of these items .	Think about the price and the nutritional value of food while buying.
	3) Demonstration: prepare children’s favourite sweet at low cost (e.g. chikki, jaggery and nuts)	Prepare nutritious foods (e.g. bhel using germinated lentils, or a laddu made from dates)	Prepare nutritious foods (e.g. bhel using sprouts, spinach salad, halim seed laddus)
	4) Organise a Food Store in class where the children can sell food items.	Demonstration: go to a shop and buy a nutritious food item for yourself for not more than ten rupees.	Plan your own diet
		Make a chart as follows: Food required by the body and Nutrition obtained from it. E.g. Rice - Carbohydrates, Lentils, Eggs, Proteins etc.	Discuss and analyse why women at home e.g. grandmothers, mothers or girls keep a fast.
		Talk about the difference between purchased and homemade foods.	Scientific experiment: Test for adulteration in various foods available in the market.
		Have a discussion about the addictions.	Get the older children to teach younger ones the science of diet and nutrition.

Health and illness

	Stage 1 (Std. 1 to 3)	Stage 2 (Std. 4 to 6)	Stage 3 (Std. 7 to 8)
Objective	To understand the following issues: Why do we fall ill? What is an illness? To know the airborne and waterborne germs .	To understand how germs enter our body through air, water and food. To know the effects of cold, cough, fever, vomiting, loose motions, to learn about illnesses of the respiratory and digestive systems and their treatment. To know how to prevent being infected, how to improve our immunity. First Aid.	To understand what care we must take to avoid illnesses. Essential services e.g. services offered at a health care centre. How to avoid water, air and noise pollution? To understand the causes and effects of anaemia as well as its treatment.
Activities	1) Make a poster showing how germs/ viruses enter our body. View them through a microscope. 2) Carry out projects on Illnesses we typically face during the monsoon. 3) Teach each child to stitch a handkerchief for himself/herself and to keep his/her teeth and nails clean. 4) Role-play: The care to be taken if suffering from ailments such as cold, fever, vomiting, loose motions etc.	The fight (between the germs and the white blood cells) put up by the body when germs/viruses enter it. What will I do if I have a fever, catch a cold or get loose motions etc. Demonstrate and conduct a practical: Prepare a first-aid kit. Prepare an ORS (Oral rehydration solution) to treat dehydration. Role-play: The care to be taken if suffering from ailments such as cold, fever, vomiting, loose motions etc.	Discuss the need for exercise, diet and rest and how to plan our day to meet these requirements. Find out whether the women at home suffer from anaemia by examining their eyes and tongues. Inform them about the importance of eating tri colour meals and iron tablets. Display pictorial information about anaemia and inform them about healthcare services available at subsidised rates. Role-play: A visit to the casualty ward of a hospital.



Pictures taken with Thanks from 'Savalitalya Goshti'

Posters about Health made by Khelghar Tais

My picture (How do I look?)

The objective of this activity is to build one’s confidence through building one’s self-image and improving it.

“Look how sweet she is! So fair and chubby!”

“Oh! If he hasn’t grown tall, how will he get a wife?”

“How will she get on in life? There is no one as dark-skinned as her in your family.”

“Gosh! She has an absolutely flat nose!”

Children have to hear such comments from an early young age. Slightly older children acquire nicknames such as blackie, whitie, shortie etc. It is also quite common amongst children to tease each other based on one’s physical attributes and deformities. This often results in forming a negative self image. Sometimes the result is an inferiority or a superiority complex, both of which can affect a child’s self-confidence.

At Khelghar, it is our objective to understand the children’s ideas about their physical appearance and to teach them to joyfully accept their bodies. Our looks are partly nature’s gift to us and partly, they can be transformed through our efforts. Our self-image is shaped by our self-confidence. It is important to help children realise that they do not have to accept the beauty standards decided by society. We must teach them to look at the diversity that exists in nature and inspire them to look for beauty in diverse elements. Similarly, we have to also explain to them the dangers of commenting on someone’s looks or complexion

	Stage 1 (Std. 1 to 3)	Stage 2 (Std. 4 to 6)	Stage 3 (Std. 7 to 8)
Objective	To look at oneself consciously. To acquire a good vocabulary relating to the body.	To express opinions about what one likes and what one does not like about one’s body.	To understand the geographical and genetic factors that determine one’s appearance. Emotions affect appearance: cheerfulness and self-confidence enhance it.
Activities	1) Children draw their own pictures and name the different parts of their body.	Children look at themselves carefully in a mirror and draw a picture highlighting their prominent features.	After a certain time period, children make a note of the various changes in their faces.
	2) Children look at their own faces in a mirror and draw their sketch.	Children write about: “What is different about me?” (It is important to have a good vocabulary of adjectives.)	Self-acceptance. Children make a note of all their good traits.
	3) Children discuss the reasons for liking or not liking certain physical traits.	Children discuss the reasons for liking or not liking certain physical traits.	Acceptance of things that one does not like. Children play the game ‘Thankfully’ to discover the positives in themselves.
	4) Children then re-examine their face after having washed it clean and once again draw its picture.	Children discuss the variations arising in complexion, looks, height, build etc. due to geographical differences.	Children discuss the geographical, social and biological factors that determine the way I look.
	5) Children revise the names of organs and related adjectives.	Children discuss body hygiene, the importance of tidiness and the hygiene products available in the market.	Children discuss the consequences of teasing and mocking on account of physical handicaps.

At Khelghar, the following activities can be conducted on the topic of ‘My Appearance’.

- Children in the first to third grades can generally draw their own image without having to look at themselves in the mirror. Since they have no inhibitions about it, they are quite happy to draw their own picture. Now get them to paste the picture in their notebook and listen to what they have to say about it. If the child cannot write down her comments, then Tai or Dada should do so for her. These pictures indirectly tell us a great deal about the child’s self-image. It helps a lot in understanding children’s problems and their nature.

- With children above fourth grade, you can take the activity where they draw their picture by looking into a mirror. Stick a strip of paper on top of the mirror with “How do I look?” written in large letters on it and ask the children to observe themselves minutely before drawing their own picture. For this purpose, it is better to have large size mirror at Khelghar which can show the entire body. Let them take their own time to observe themselves in the mirror. It is alright if some children draw only their face while others draw picture of the entire body. Now, let each child write about “What does this picture say?” in his/her notebook. Do not discuss at length what they’ve written. What is expected from this exercise is that the child and the Tai understand the child’s self-image and that the child accepts and observes it.

- It is now time to take the children to the next level where they can think more deeply.

Ask each child to write a detailed description of his/her appearance. After they’ve closely observed themselves

in the mirror, suggest certain points by writing them on the board. For example, complexion, height, nose, eyes, skin, hair, build etc. Now, ask the children to make a list of “what I like most and what I dislike about my body”. While drawing up these lists, ask them to note down why they like or dislike a particular feature. If the children are not too keen on writing, then they can simply talk about it. Children may have certain complexes about their looks, which may, at times, lower their self-confidence. If, however, they understand the geographical and cultural factors that determine appearances, then they might find it easier to overcome their complexes. In the following paragraphs, we have tried to review some of these reasons.

a) Complexion:

‘Having a fair complexion is good, having a dark complexion is bad’ is a common belief among Indian society. Our minds are slaves to many western ideas about beauty, thanks to the one hundred and fifty years of British rule over India. In our mythology, deities like Ram and Krishna are depicted as dark-skinned. With the help of a globe, explain the following facts to the children - India is a country located in the northern hemisphere and through which the Tropic of Cancer passes. This means that it is a hot tropical country! We experience extreme hot summers for a few months every year. To protect us from the intense ultraviolet rays of the sun, our skin has more pigmentation than people from cold climate zones. This is what makes us dark-skinned. Even amongst us, those who work outdoors in the sun are darker than those who work indoors. There is therefore no reason to feel inferior about being dark-skinned.



My Image

“I think that I am hungry and thirsty. I do not know whether to laugh or to cry. I can see some sadness. From my eyes I could see that I want to play. My head was aching, and my stomach was rumbling. My mind tells me that I am very beautiful. I will go home soon and break my Ramzan fast at 7 o’clock. In my mind I think about when it will be Ramzan Eid. My mind tells me that then I will wear new clothes. In my mind I often think when it will be 7 o’clock and when I will go home.

Sanaa Shakil Sheikh, Standard 7

“Blaming oneself, feeling that one is inferior’ is an emotion that never does anyone any good. In fact, we learn and improve from our mistakes And each new day presents us with newer opportunities.

- Louise Hay



b) Build

Our build is influenced by geographical factors. People residing in mountainous regions, deserts and cold zones are generally non-vegetarians. Their diet contains more proteins because of which they tend to be tall and heavily built. People living in primarily agrarian countries and in tropical zones, like us, are generally dark-skinned and of medium build. Those with a tendency to fall ill frequently are stunted.

c) Heredity

The genes that we inherit from our parents and relatives influence our appearance. That is why we resemble them to a certain extent.

- When the children have finished drawing their picture by looking at themselves in a mirror, ask them “How will you draw a picture of your mind?” Now tell them to peep inside their mind while looking at themselves in the mirror.

We understand our mind through our emotions and thoughts. These emotions and thoughts are intangible and can be expressed through the medium of ‘language’ and ‘pictures’.

Ask the children to sit quietly, look within and then write down what they think about themselves. What will emerge from juxtaposing the picture of the body and that of the mind will be their true image!

Sunita is looking inside her mind through the mirror.



Sunita peeping in her own mind through mirror.

- Ask children to state the words that are used to tease someone on account of his/her appearance even if such words refer to a physical deformity. Normally, children are not allowed to use words such as ‘cross-eyed’, ‘skinny’, ‘battery’, ‘blackie’ etc. at school so they are more than happy to blurt them out when they are allowed to do so at Khelghar. With older children, you will also get to hear words pertaining to sex organs. Do not express any reaction to this, neither positive nor negative. Simply write down the words on the board as the children say them.

Now ask them, “How will you feel if you are called these names?” They might say, “I will feel angry, hurt.” You need to explain to them, with the help of examples, that the consequences could be worse than this. Give

them examples to explain how low self-esteem can harm you.

Ask them to think about what they will do when they are tempted to tease someone or when someone is being teased in their presence. Do not be tempted to make them say that they will never tease anyone since this leads nowhere. The only thing that you can do is to motivate children to think. What actually happens later may be different for each child.

3) What do I like?

This activity aims at making children understand and prioritise their likes and dislikes.

Ask the children questions such as, “What do you like to eat? What do you like to do? or Whom do you like?”. Then give them about ten minutes to think and to list down the answers in their notebooks. Each one should state one thing that he/she likes. Make a rule that when it is their turn to share, they are not allowed to repeat things stated earlier. They could also add things stated by the others to their own list.

Tangible things such as ice cream, TV, bicycle and actions such as playing, sleeping can be part of this list. Similarly, they may also include their mother or the Tai at Khelghar or even a friend in the list of things that they like. Now ask each one to select five things that he/she likes the most.

Once they have finalised these five things, ask them to think about what they should do in order to get these things and to discuss it with the group.

I will be beautiful

The objective of this activity is to take the children’s notion of beauty beyond the ‘physical appearance’ to include the person’s virtues. Children should think about “Why do I like a particular thing, person or place? “What aspect of it do I particularly like?” Each child has an innate desire to look beautiful and tries to do so in her own way.

You could initiate a discussion by asking, “What do children of your age do to look beautiful?” Then talk about the advertisements that market beauty products. Children see their favourite heroes and heroines in advertisements and are easily enticed to buy. This is how they get trapped in consumerism. Many a time, this also results in unnecessary expenditure. They are disappointed on realising that the use of beauty products hasn’t brought about any significant change. There is nothing wrong in having the desire to look beautiful. But

what is “beauty”? In this section, we have proposed several activities that aim at getting children to think about the notion of beauty and its components, both tangible and intangible, and all that is needed to enhance one’s physical beauty such as a good diet, exercise, rest, cleanliness, the importance of hygiene, being cheerful and zealous etc.

1) You can talk to children from first to fourth grades about the different nuances of the word ‘beauty’. This will help them discover words and shades of meanings beyond the words ‘nice’ and ‘beautiful’.

Give children an opportunity to observe some beautiful places, persons, things, pictures etc. Then ask each of them to select and describe one of these things. While doing so, introduce words such as clean and tidy/with sharp features, decorated, colourful, cheerful, peaceful, good-looking, expressive, dynamic etc.

2) Now ask them to examine the following things and to state the differences between them:

- My face when I have just got up from sleep, and my face after being washed clean and dried.
- My face when I am very angry, and my face when I have been praised in class.
- A very messy cupboard/house/Khelghar, and how it looks after it has been tidied up.
- A dry and barren landscape in summers, and the same landscape after the rains have made it lush green.
- My mother’s face when she is ill, and her face when she is chatting leisurely.

The children can collect pictures on these topics or draw them using their imagination. After this, it is important to talk to them. This exercise aims at drawing their attention to the fact that ‘beauty’ is a function of many factors: external factors such as cleanliness, tidiness etc. as well as one’s state of mind at the time. What is expected from this is that the children go from observing and thinking, expressing their opinions and listening to others’ opinions, to finally reaching a common understanding.

3) In this exercise, ask each child to bring a picture of a person that he/she thinks is ‘beautiful’. Ask them to paste this picture on one side of their notebook and to write why he/she thinks that this person is ‘beautiful’ and on the other side what exactly he/she likes about this person. Give them some pointers such as complexion, looks, style, build, hair, smile, facial expressions, personality, qualities etc.

After finishing the write-up, each child should present it before the group.

This will bring forth their ideas about beauty. Tai should also bring some photographs or pictures of persons that she thinks are beautiful. These should include people who are old and affectionate, dark-skinned and accomplished and also people who are dear to the children. Certain aspects of beauty such as complexion, height, the shape of your nose, eyes etc. are nature's gift. The others can be acquired through efforts, e.g. facial expressions, style, build etc. A group discussion needs to take place on these acquired aspects. Beauty does not depend only on physical appearance. People who are dear to us always come across as beautiful to us.

4) I will be beautiful! But how?

Our beauty depends upon many factors. One part of it is our diet, exercise, sleep and our mental state. The second is cleanliness, tidiness and our understanding of aesthetics. And the third and the most important part is our 'self-image'!

How do I feel about myself? Have I accepted myself as I am? If I have answers to these questions, then I will not be worried or afraid of 'What will people say about me?'

'I will consider others' comments as their personal views. I will be the one to decide how their opinions should affect me.' This much clarity of thought will ultimately lead to 'self-confidence'!

If I can control my negative thoughts then I can be happy and energetic. I will be able to learn from my experiences

and from the people I meet. My thoughts, my ideas will not stagnate at one place. They will always flow and renew themselves. I will be a new person, perpetually!

If I am able to bring about desirable changes in me, then it is safe to say that my 'self-image' is balanced and constructive. Let us consider one example: a girl who is happy that she is wearing a new dress looks attractive to us. On the other hand, if a good-looking girl who is heavily made up walks past looking down on others, we consider her a snob. We don't like her.

Conveying this message to all the children may be a lengthy process but can certainly be achieved through 'group discussion'.

This activity helps the children realise that irrespective of how we look, our 'beauty' is dependent upon many other factors beyond our physical appearance and that we can work on these factors to look 'beautiful'.


Towards the end of this activity, work with the children on questions such as, 'How am I? & 'How would I like to be?' Let the children take their own time to write down their thoughts. Later, have a group discussion about this. The discussion will show them the path to self-development.

4) The Good and the bad

This section aims at encouraging children to think about their notions about values. Children often imbibe certain values owing to the circumstances that surround them. But are these values really 'useful'?

<p>What do I like to do? I like to draw pictures. I like to study. I like to go to Khelghar. I like to watch TV. I like to play. I like to read story books.</p>		<p>What are my good qualities? Not messing up things. Keeping the house clean. Not fighting at home.</p>
	<p>The beautiful 'me'</p>	
<p>What changes do I need to make in myself? Stay clean. Stay calm. Help mother. Do housework. Go to Khelghar every day.</p>		<p>Whose help shall I seek to change myself? My mother's help to learn housework. Tai's help when I am angry. My friend's help so that she calls me when going to Khelghar.</p>

This was written by a fourth grade girl from Khelghar.
(Mangal had written this in her dialect.)



"My life should not resemble a directionless wooden plank floating atop the ocean waves, but rather like a ship with an excellent navigation system. I will not let myself be dragged around by the currents of situations. I will decide on my own which direction to move toward in".



- Albert Ellis



Do I want to accept them? The present section helps children decide this for themselves.

Children do not like thinking or talking about “Ideals”, and certainly do not like being ‘lectured’ about them. To think about this subject, one has to take time and introspect. Children generally try to avoid this. So it is up to us to motivate the children to think about it. For this, we need to make them understand that this process can be enjoyable and can help in self development. Once they realise this, they understand how invigorating this feeling can be and then they are willing to hold our hand. They take keen interest in this subject when they see that this way of thinking is also useful in other spheres of life.

What is ‘good’? What is ‘bad’?

It is fairly easy to bring up this topic with very young children (first to third graders). Since they do not realise its scope and challenges, their reactions are not of fear, anger or escapism and they participate quite willingly in discussions on this topic. There are various ways in which you can introduce this subject.

You can begin with a round of appreciation where each child talks about one good trait, habit or behaviour of the child sitting next to him/her. This game should be played at least once a month. This activity makes them realise what is good.

Ask the children questions like:

- How would you like the world around you to be and how would you not like it to be?
- What would you like as a gift?

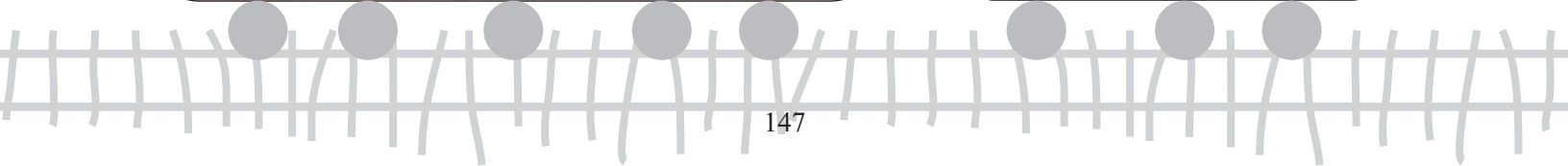
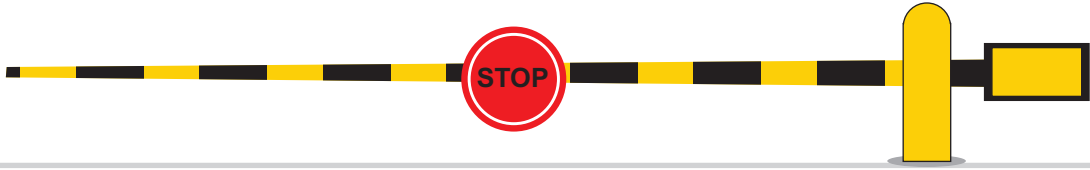
The Tai should write the words suggested by the children on a board and then direct the discussion towards the connotations of these words. This will ensure a more elaborate thought process around the words. For example, the word ‘Prize’ = ‘we receive it when we excel at something.’

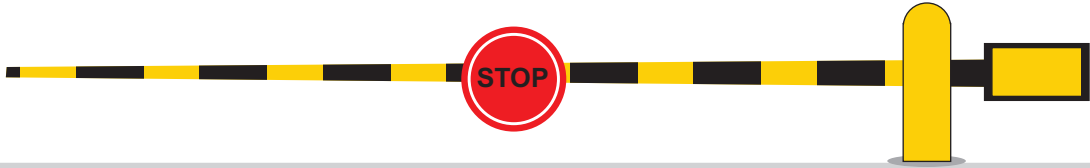
During this discussion, Tai must listen carefully, respect and try to understand what they are saying. It is the words suggested by the children that should guide the discussion and take it forward. Tai should learn to restrain herself from expressing her own feelings and the desire to teach.

After this basic discussion on words and their meanings –

Turn the conversation towards ‘Why did you think this was ‘Good’?’ For example, why is the word ‘sweets’ ‘good’? Because when you get ‘sweets’ you feel ‘good’. Thus, from a tangible item like ‘sweets’, we move to the intangible idea of ‘feeling good’. You can take this discussion further by asking questions such as, ‘Who gives us sweets?’. When they reply, ‘Mother’ or ‘Father’, you can explore this idea that ‘you feel good because somebody's efforts are involved in it’.

This basic discussion helps you achieve a lot of things such as initiating a thought process about a certain topic, encouraging them to think and explore it further, increasing their vocabulary etc.





The following activities will help you take the subject further.

- This activity that is associated with language studies requires them to match the cards having the names and qualities of people or objects written on them. The activity could be extended to making sentences from the words, reading and writing etc. You can prepare paper strips with sentences related to the good and bad things that have emerged from the discussion and ask the children to classify them accordingly by placing them either in the circle labelled ‘Good’ or the one labelled ‘Bad’. This is how a reading activity can progress.

- Divide the children into two groups. A pair of children from each group comes forward to enact a scene silently and the others have to say if the action is good or bad. The groups take turns to do so. For example:

- Troubling someone – bad

- Helping where help is needed – good

- Chit chatting freely – good

- Looking down upon someone – bad

In this game, it is the children who decide what is good or bad. Tai should make two columns on the board titled ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ and write down the verbs enacted under these columns. The children should then discuss why a particular action is good or bad. It is sometimes difficult to decide whether something is 100% good or 100% bad. This is where a discussion helps to clarify things.

- For the students of grades four to seven, this activity can be taken forward through enacting the actions.

One group can enact a situation that depicts bad behaviour. The other group then enacts to show how this situation can be transformed with the help of positive action. For example, if the first group shows two children fighting with each other, the other group demonstrates how the two children can resolve their differences through dialogue. Here Tai or Dada should not guide the children in any manner. The objective of this exercise is to let the children express their acquired ideas of the good and the bad and to encourage them to think and express their thoughts about how the bad can be transformed into good. If a group is unable to convert the bad into good, then give the other group a chance to do it. If neither of the group can do so, then Tai or Dada should show them how it can be done. Then have a discussion on whether the children agree with Tai or Dada. Based on the willingness of the children to discuss further, you can decide where to end the discussion.

Good and Bad Qualities

In the context of ‘what is good and what is bad’, the activities conducted so far have led the children, and to some extent us too, closer to their thoughts. It is now time to examine these thoughts in terms of rational thinking. Now ask the children the question, ‘On what basis do we say that a person is good or bad?’ Through the discussion that follows, we should introduce to them words that describe good and bad qualities and explain to them the nuances of those words. The children will share their experiences or may give a long description of the good or bad quality. Tai or Dada should propose the word that fits the description. For example, ‘When I am unwell my mother puts me to bed, gives me medicine and takes care of me.’ This can be described with the help of words such as affection, love, caring, warmth etc. Make a list of these words on the board so that they are always in sight.

My good and bad qualities

Several tools can be used to encourage children to introspect on their good and bad qualities.

- Ask the children to make a list of their strengths (good qualities) and weaknesses (bad qualities) on a fresh sheet of paper. The other members of the group can be of great help in this process of exploring oneself.


- In a small group of seven or eight children, you can ask each child to come forward so that the group can together discuss his/her good and bad qualities and suggest some additions or changes to the list.

- In a large group of fifteen to twenty children, you can ask each child to write his/her name on a sheet of paper and circulate it in the group. Each child should then write his/her opinions about the good and bad qualities of that child.

Here, Tai or Dada needs to be tactful to ensure that the discussion does not degenerate into a teasing or mocking session or that a child is not intentionally targeted. This exercise is extremely useful in helping the children to understand themselves better.

- Ask each child to write in bold letters one quality that he/she would like to possess. Now place these sheets right in the middle of the circle in which the children are sitting. Invite each of them to talk about the quality chosen by him/ her. They could begin by telling why they think that they should have this quality or how they will benefit from it.

By the end of this exercise, we aim to arrive at ‘What is



How I look at myself depends on my thoughts and thoughts can be changed.

Negative thoughts give rise to negative emotions.

When I change those thoughts, the emotions would change as well.



Louis Hey



good behaviour'. We could propose a simple definition of 'good behaviour' as 'behaviour that is in the best interests of me as well as others.'

5) Seeking clarity about our concept of values

At Khelghar, the children should get the opportunity to experience values such as liberty, equality, democracy, logical thinking, aesthetics, transparency in relationships, support and dialogue etc.

Since values are intangible, you need to think about them consciously so as to grasp them. The following activities are designed to help children easily understand these values through their own experience.

Divide the class in four groups:

- Ask the first group to consider the question: 'What makes you happy?' Give them pointers such as places, people, events, objects etc. to help them think.
- Ask the second group to discuss 'What am I afraid of, what am I worried about?' You can give them similar pointers here too.
- Ask the third group to think about 'My dreams'. Dreams could be about themselves, their family, their basti or about the whole world.
- Ask the fourth group to consider the question: 'What do you think will give you support in life?'

To help them to think, suggest the following pointers: education, money, persons, degree/position etc. For each of these points, ask them to also consider 'Why do I think so?'

Later, when each group is presenting its thoughts, you should encourage members of the other groups also to join in the discussion.

While going through this process, children start seeking answers to what is good and what is bad in their lives; what needs to change; what they must do to change those things and who can help them.

The facilitator must prepare for this activity carefully. He/she must have clarity about these values and should be able to demonstrate it through his/her own behaviour.

During the discussion, the facilitator should introduce the value in question through a relevant example. For instance, if a girl is afraid of her elder brother or father, the example could be used to explain the gender inequalities that exist in families and in society. Similarly, the importance of having a dialogue can be highlighted while discussing the points about fighting. Children in Khelghar learn about values through the behaviour of those guiding them. Detailed discussions help them understand and associate words and their precise meanings with their corresponding values.

6) Changing oneself – Self-planning

Understanding one's strengths and limitations is the first step towards changing oneself. We need to orient the children towards 'self-planning' and for this purpose, we need to explain to them the various steps involved in the process of change. Tai should begin by telling them a

A ninth grade student wrote the following while participating in the “Exploring Oneself” module at Khelghar...

How do I look?

I am thin and tall like a bamboo! I love my height. My nose is long like my father’s. I have an oval face. It’s tiny but goes well with my body. There’s always a smile on my face. Even when I am angry, my face does not reflect the anger. I have thin lips. My ears seem a bit too big, but they are nice. I resemble my father.

My Qualities

I am cool-headed, affectionate, sensitive and frank. I always help others. I am curious and always keen to learn. I am determined and hard working. I am confident of attaining what I strive for and am happy when I attain it.

My likes and dislikes

I am constantly in search of new things. I like visiting new places and talking to new friends. I like being surrounded by people. I like to ride vehicles. For the time being, it’s just a bicycle, but I like it. I like to be active all the time. I love to cook and eat, to conduct scientific experiments, to act in plays and to write my name in style.

What all can I do?

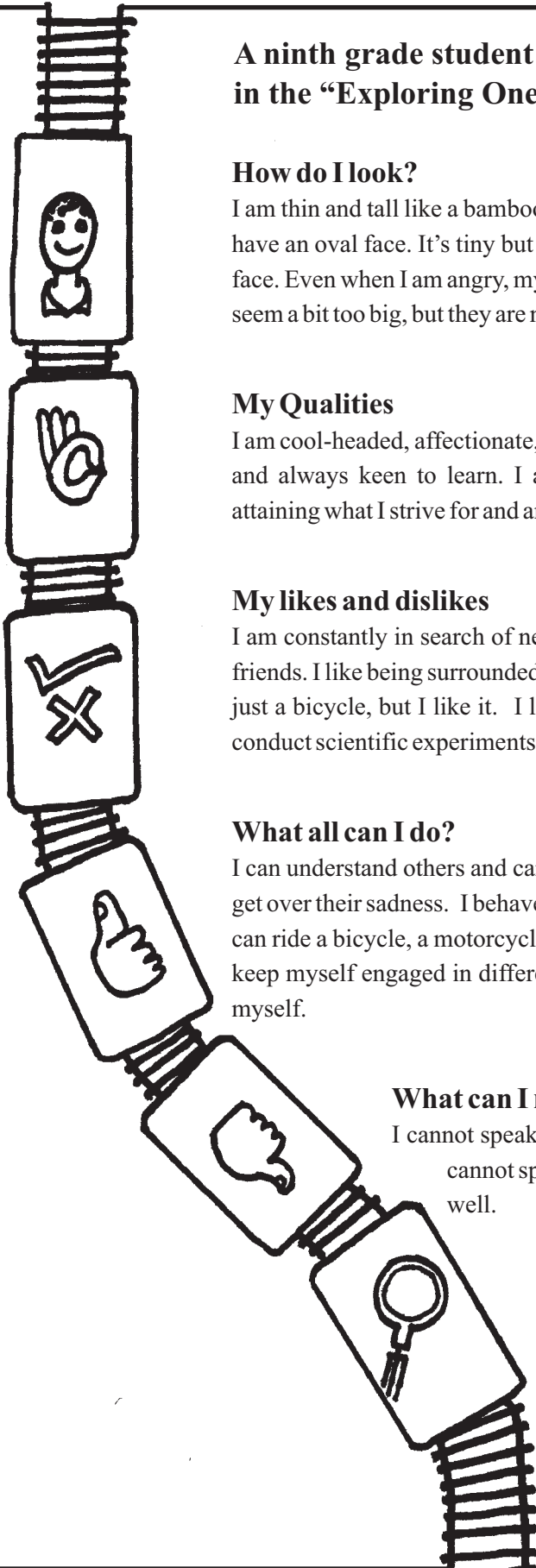
I can understand others and can make them laugh. If someone is sad, I can help them get over their sadness. I behave responsibly. I can teach others as per their inclination. I can ride a bicycle, a motorcycle. I am always inquisitive and keep asking questions! I keep myself engaged in different ways. I can hold an uninhibited conversation with myself.

What can I not do?

I cannot speak or read English. Since my mother tongue is Lamani, I cannot speak Marathi very well. I want to learn to speak and write well.

How do I think I should be?

Always learning new things, doing a lot of activities,
Climbing the ladder of success,
Bringing about changes in others,
Loved by all!



small thing that she wants to change in herself. E.g. 'improving her handwriting' or 'keeping her temper under control' etc. She should then ask the children what they think she should do to bring about the necessary change.

This discussion should bring forth the necessary steps to bring about the desired changes:

- 1) Firstly, to accept that 'it is necessary to change myself in this respect'.
- 2) To not feel guilty about a particular shortcoming. To recognise that 'making a mistake is a wonderful opportunity to learn something new' and to start working on it without harbouring any negative feelings about it.
- 3) To firmly determine that 'I want to bring about this change'.
- 4) To decide what exactly should be changed.
- 5) To set an approximate time in which this change should be brought about.
- 6) To determine a plan of action.
- 7) To seek advice and help from others.
- 8) To take cognizance of the change in oneself and accept it.

- 9) To observe if the desired change is taking place as decided and to keep a record of it.

Once you succeed in this, tell this to the others. Telling everybody about your success makes you take a note of your own effort. Furthermore, it makes you unknowingly assume responsibility to continue the effort. After this, the group should fix a common 'goal', e.g. 'to bring a pen and a notebook when we come to Khelghar'. A little later, it could be 'to avoid using abusive language'. Take the help of the above-mentioned steps to bring about the change. If the points are noted step-wise on the board for the children then the discussion will be more effective.

At this stage, the children should select one of their shortcomings and draw up a plan for overcoming it. But the inspiration for that must come from within. They should understand the difference between their own initiative to change as against someone suggesting or telling or coaxing them to change. This is an important step towards owning responsibility. To achieve this, it is important not only to motivate the children but also to maintain a dialogue with them and extend help whenever required.



Khelghar children at Gathering - A way of expression

Progress on the decisions taken by the children should be reviewed every week without fail, at the individual as well as the group level.

7) Children's rights

In 1989, the United Nations Convention drafted a treaty listing the Fundamental Rights of every Child. In 1992, the Government of India accepted this treaty. It is our collective responsibility to secure the rights of all the children below the age of 18 years without any discrimination. Some of the important clauses are listed below:

- The welfare of children must be central to all decisions affecting them.
- Every child has the right to life and it is the duty of adults to ensure their security.
- All steps must be taken to protect children from physical, sexual and mental abuse.
- A child has every right to express his/her views and opinions. Imposing restrictions on it is wrong.
- A child's upbringing and his/her development is the responsibility of both parents. Where circumstances prevent this from happening, it is our collective responsibility to help out.
- Children have the right to education, which means, not just schooling but also play, entertainment and rest.
- Children below the age of 15 years should not be employed.

This treaty is a promise made by adults to children and serves as a guide for all those working with children. Children in Khelghar and their parents must also be aware of these rights. The parents and children should be vigilant about their own rights and those of others and ensure that these are not being violated. In case of violation, they should feel free to talk to Tai or Dada at Khelghar. That's the kind of atmosphere that Khelghar should aspire to build. Adults often believe that 'Children's rights and their duties are two sides of the same coin'. To think that 'children must perform their duties first in order to claim their rights' is unfair. Children's rights are inalienable. The fact that they should learn to assume their responsibilities is a different matter.

8) Children's responsibilities

Children in Khelghar should be encouraged and given

the opportunity to shoulder responsibilities. Teachers should openly talk to them about their behaviour that hurts or troubles the teachers or the other children. Similarly, they should also talk about actions that make them happy. This helps children re-examine their rash behaviour. In all group tasks, everyone has to adhere to some rules. The task is accomplished and everyone is satisfied only if each person involved follows the rules. It is the joint responsibility of Tai and the children to make learning and teaching at Khelghar a joyful and meaningful experience for all. To ensure this, set up some rules through group consensus for the children as well as for Tai. It should be a collective responsibility to ensure that the rules are being followed. In this context, please refer to the section on 'Positive Discipline' on page 50 of this book.

A similar discussion could be held on the expectations that children have from adults and vice-versa, at home and at school. Accordingly, you could invite the adults to participate in these discussions or the children could write them letters.

9) What if my own rights are violated?

How should I deal with a person who is deliberately troubling me or making me do something against my will or with a situation wherein I feel insulted? Such issues necessitate immediate action. However, tempers are running high and the atmosphere is tense in such situations. Children are emotionally charged and may end up playing the blame game that will only further worsen matters. At such times, to help the children to calm down, talk to them individually and help them to vent out. When they have calmed down and can think constructively, all concerned persons can come together to discuss and seek a constructive solution to the problem.

Often, we are preoccupied with smaller issues that keep gnawing at us though nothing serious has happened. But we feel we should talk to the children about these issues. This is when the exercise, 'What will I do if' comes in handy. Listed below are some examples of issues that you can write down on paper strips:

- My father just does not listen to what I say.
- My elder brother ate up my share of sweets.
- Suman's (9 years) elder brother does not do any housework.
- A rowdy boy in Ram's class (grade 5) bullies him.

First, get the children to discuss each of the issues in smaller groups and later, take up each issue for discussion with the entire group. (See ‘What will I do if’ in ‘Some valuable tips’ on page 201). To steer the discussion onto a constructive path and seek answers that will remain relevant and useful in the long run, Tai should keep the following points in mind.

When an issue is brought before Tai, it is likely that the information presented is one-sided. It is highly possible that Tai may form an opinion based on this information and give a knee-jerk reaction. It is necessary at this point for Tai to keep her emotions in check. She should first try to understand the issue from the other Tais, the friends and parents of the child and anyone else who may be related to the issue. Once all the necessary information is available, she should rationally examine her opinions and that of the others before deciding what is fair and in everybody’s interests. Only then, various alternative solutions can be sought. Several alternatives are often revealed during discussions with the people concerned.

The next stage is to lead the children from their confused emotional state to a sense of discernment. Group discussions and sometimes one-on-one discussions with the persons concerned are helpful. Group discussions help trigger the thought process even amongst those who are not related to the incident. Getting into the habit of thinking is beneficial to all of us throughout our life.

Let’s understand this with the help of the following example -

‘My brother ate my share of sweets’. Now what can the child do about it?

The discussion could go like this:

Being aware that the consequences of fighting, throwing tantrums, hurling accusations etc. are never positive, decide beforehand that these cannot be an acceptable course of action.

You should talk about, ‘What is our objective?’ ‘That the brother should realise that he has been unfair and that he should try to correct his behaviour so that there is no grudge anymore about him in my mind and our relationship is more open’. Now let us turn to solutions. The following solutions may emerge through the discussion:

- Ask the brother why he did it.
- When he is calm, talk to him without getting agitated about how you felt.
- If it is difficult for you to talk to your brother, then

seek mediation from your sister or friend to do so.

- Seek help from your parents to initiate a conversation with your brother.
- Request your mother to make the sweet once again and offer your brother his share.
- Do not expect your brother to make good the hurt nor to apologise to you.

Tai should have such solutions ready so that she can add them to the solutions offered by children during this discussion.

• **Confronting someone**

It is not easy to oppose. It requires mental strength, control, constructive thought, perseverance and discretion. Besides, to be able to say what one wants to say in concise and precise words, one also needs to have good language skills. To develop these skills, you should regularly carry out linguistic activities in Khelghar. Whenever a person confronts a situation, there are usually two types of reactions to it – that of aggression or of retreat.

When we are aggressive, the finger is always pointed at the other and our own wrongdoing is overlooked. To make others do as we wish only because we are in a power position does not do anyone any good. Even if the other person remains quiet, our aggressive behaviour only sows the seeds of enmity in his/her mind and we can be certain that it will boomerang on us!

The other reaction is to retreat. In this case, the finger is always pointed at ourselves. Blaming ourselves leads us to disappointment and inferiority complex. Such behaviour is dangerous not only for us but may also give the other person the impression that it is perfectly fine to be dominating. This does not solve any problems. Avoiding both these extremes and behaving firmly in dealing with the situation is necessary to resolve the problem.

For example, ‘While Radha is studying, if the boy next to her keeps asking her questions, tries to draw her attention, keeps troubling her’, then Radha should change her seat or signal him to keep quiet. If this does not help, she should clearly tell him, “I am studying. I do not wish to talk to you right now. Do not trouble me.” If she can say this to him clearly and without being angry, the matter will end here itself. However, if the boy persists despite this, Radha should ask him, “Since you don’t want to listen to me, what should I do? Should I tell

Tai?" If he sees a resolve in Radha's demeanour, his behaviour will definitely change.

Since Khelghar is a space for co-education, parents often refuse to let girls come here. At such times, it could be useful to discuss with the children how to initiate a dialogue with their parents on this subject. Role-plays could be an effective tool to explain to them how to convince their parents without getting angry.

Through this activity, we are helping the children make the right choices and express their views firmly. The ability to stand for one's rights even when opposed, to remain firm on one's views and to effectively change the course of a disagreement, to take a step back in order to obtain a positive response from the other person, to seek others' mediation to help bring about changes in a person or a situation, are all crucial skills. It is of course necessary to have good language skills but also discretion, emotional strength, flexibility and perseverance.

Planning for the future

Self-evaluation has a major role to play in understanding oneself. It is therefore important that the children get this opportunity periodically.

- What have I done in a specific period of time?
- What have I learnt from it?
- What do I want to learn in future? How will I learn it? What will I do to learn what I want?
- Who can help me in this process?

Planning in such a way and presenting the plan to others helps accelerate children's self-development. One part of this is self-evaluation for a particular period. The other part, and the last one of the 'Exploring oneself' module is the 'Four quadrants' activity.

My good qualities	My weaknesses
What changes do I wish to bring about in myself?	How will I bring about these changes?

Ask each child to take adequate time to write about this and follow it up with a group discussion. Ask the children to make a note of the feedback given by Tai as well as the other children.

Through this process a child learns to take responsibility for herself. This is a very important life skill which is extremely useful to the children throughout their life.



'Youth group' at Khelghar



9

Working with Parents

Reach out to people
Start with their understanding
Trust their knowledge
You can say the work is well done,
when on completion,
People feel a sense of ownership.

Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu



The place of parents in children's development

'Khelaghar' aims at the development of children living in urban Bastis. This work is as academic as it is social. The situation in which children from deprived sections grow up creates many obstacles in their development. It is important to understand this situation and try to change it as much as possible and for this it becomes essential to work with the parents of the children who attend Khelghar. How can we do this? What are the difficulties encountered during this work? And how to overcome them? These matters are discussed in this chapter.

A child develops from the experiences gained at home, community and school. Children, especially those from deprived communities, often go through many negative experiences such as neglect, humiliation, punishment, accusations, and so on at these three places. These experiences create many obstacles in their development. The task of Khelghar is to overcome these obstacles and create an enriching environment for the development of these children. Child development is influenced by many factors such as the family, the neighbours, the friends, the school and the teachers.

The above factors that shape the child's environment also have economic, social and political dimensions. Matters

such as caste, religion, gender, language, native village are associated with the child from birth. Each of these determine the social status of the child as well as that of her family.

Apart from the family income some other things too depend on the profession of the child's parents. For example, if the mother of a child from an urban slum works as an unskilled labourer she is out of the house for ten to twelve hours. She is physically tired by the time she returns home. The group with which she works is less likely to provide her opportunities to learn something new or different. Conversely, if she works as a housemaid in a middle-class home her working hours are shorter. The atmosphere in these homes may be different, a little bit more progressive. While working here she gets to experience many new mores and manners, ideas and customs. She can learn something new here and it can be useful in raising her children.

Many things shape the environment around the child such as the relationship between the child's parents, addictions and illnesses in the family, number and age of siblings, predisposition towards customs, traditions and superstitions, attraction of the native village etc. These things shape the child. It is difficult to reach our goal of child development without understanding these invisible yet potent influences on the child.

Need to work with parents

Working with parents is useful with regard to the following issues.

To understand the child

The background of new Tais is often middle class. So they have many questions regarding these children. Communication with parents helps one to understand the reality of their situation.

In order to work specifically towards the child's development we need to understand the child's behaviour, temperament, habits and problems. The child's friends and siblings of course help in this work but the most important help comes from parents.

The child cannot tell Tai everything about her situation. Information can be obtained from her parents. For example, a child is pretty silent in class. She rarely



Spontaneous participation of parents

participates in the activities. At such times home visits reveal information regarding the financial condition of home, domestic violence etc. This can help us decide if the child needs emotional support.

Talking to the parents can more accurately reveal the exact circumstances, happenings and problems in the child's home and neighborhood that affect her. This information definitely helps in understanding the child.

To solve the problems

If a problem crops up suddenly with a child the cooperation of the parents is very much essential to find and implement effective solutions in the best interest of the child. This will only be possible if there is a relationship of trust and dialogue between Tai and the child's parents.

To increase children's participation in Khelghar

Children's attendance regularity and participation in Khelghar activities is important. If parents understand the importance of Khelghar and its underlying values then they too encourage the child. Children start attending Khelghar and will be consistent too. For this, it is important to develop sound dialogue with parents from the very beginning. Parents should be involved in

Khelghar activities wherever possible.

To increase parental involvement in children's development

The parents get to know about many issues such as co-education, the mindset of adolescent girls, positive discipline etc. through interactions with Khelghar Tais. This increases their positive participation in children's development.

To augment parent's contribution to the Khelghar project

Parents can contribute to the work at Khelghar in a variety of ways. Some of them may teach their skills to children; some may procure help for Khelghar through their acquaintances; some may attend Khelghar regularly and contribute as volunteers. For this to happen, however, they need to develop attachment with Khelghar. We should get them involved in the decision making process of Khelghar. We need to have regular communication with them. Working together provides an immense boost to the project.

The nature of the work with parents

1) Information collection

It helps a lot to understand the child if Khelghar has



Parents presenting a skit at a Khelghar get-together.

accurate information about the child's native village, language, caste, religion, occupation etc.

For this, information should be collected by using questionnaires and actually meeting the parents. (A sample of this questionnaire is provided in Appendix 2/ Volume II) Based on study of this information some salient points regarding the circumstances of the children in the urban Basti can be comprehended. For example, 'Men in Laxminagar Basti mainly work as construction workers and women as domestic workers.' After a couple of home visits and on developing some acquaintance with the parents this information can be collected.

2) Home visits

A lot of things are revealed when Tai visits children's homes and meets the parents. Besides discerning the financial situation of the family she gets to know the problems faced by the family, home environment and parents' priorities. Home visits enable interaction with children, their parents and other relatives. Their personal difficulties may also be talked about. If Tai tells parents about the good qualities she noticed in their children it helps improve the parent-child communication. Home visits reveal much about the children. Certain things are understood through mere observation and some through communication. It also enhances the relationship between Tais and the children.

3) Parents' Meetings

The Parents' Meeting initiative is extensively used to enable communication with parents. Let's learn a little more about it. Child development is the collective responsibility of parents and Khelghar Tais. In order to fulfill this responsibility well, both of them should take time to sit together and exchange views. Khelghar should take the initiative to hold a Parents Meet at least once a month.

What is done by Khelghar regarding the development of children? What can the parents do in this regard? What problems arise or may arise? This should be discussed in the parents' meetings.

So that parents attend parents' meetings

Tais have to make special efforts to get parents involved in parents' meetings. They have to go out for work for eight to ten hours a day and also take care of the housework. Hence it is really difficult for the parents to make time for parent's meeting.

To help them attend the parents' meeting constant communication with them is essential. A convenient time and place needs to be found. This time is usually in the evening or on a holiday. Khelghar Tai will not find this time convenient for her and yet needs to adjust somehow. If the parents are informed about the meeting through children there is no guarantee that they will actually show up. So she should visit their homes, convince them about the importance of attending the meeting and invite them to attend the meeting. Owing to the positive experiences in the parents' meetings, soon parents start attending these meetings on their own initiative.

Some parents arrive on the given time at the parents' meetings but want to return home early. Some parents arrive late but are in no hurry to return home. Therefore, the initial and the last parts of the parent's meetings should be set aside for personal interaction with parents. The parents like to talk about their child separately instead of talking in the group.

During the parents' meetings things prepared by children, their writings and pictures etc., should be exhibited. The parents love to see and understand their child's progress.

Parental attendance is low in the early stages. At such times, Tai should visit their house, talk to them and understand the reasons why they could not attend the parents' meetings. Even if only two or three parents arrive for the meeting the meeting should be conducted. If the parents get a negative experience of the meeting the enthusiasm may dwindle further.

Topics that can be taken up in the parents' meetings

- The purpose of Khelghar, the activity based programmes and the importance of parental cooperation
- Exhibition of Khelghar activities, children's writings, pictures etc.
- Health, hygiene, diet and illness
- Parent-child relationship
- Problems faced by a few children having learning difficulties and solutions
- Positive discipline
- The importance of having rapport with school and how to improve it
- Problems faced by the girl child
- Gender equality
- Domestic Violence
- Psyche of the Adolescents

Difficulties encountered in communicating with parents

There may be some negative experiences while working with parents in the early days of Khelghar. Sometimes parents keep in touch with Khelghar only to get money and goods from there. Sometimes they say one thing to us and say something different in our absence. Sometimes they believe in rumors and make reckless accusations.

This is a difficult challenge for Tais. Without getting angry Tais need to understand the reasons why parents behave this way. These people often work as laborers in the unorganized sector and are from the lower rungs of the social, economic ladder where they frequently face insults. It is very unlikely that they have had good experiences with the people of the so-called upper classes. They must have had very few opportunities to express what they feel. Rarely may they have received respectful treatment from the other person or positive experiences such as kinship. They may have had experience of people who use them for political gains or of people who offer alms as if they are doing a favor. Based on these experiences they may form wrong opinions about Tais in Khelghar. Encountering deprivation at every step in the Basti they may have formed the tendency to think only about oneself. They may have got into the habit of thinking only about the present moment and not of a time too far ahead.

Sometimes parents' expectations can also be unrealistic...even to the extent of lending divinity to Tais or thinking that all their problems will be solved by Khelghar. At such times it is essential to understand the situation, accept it and remove all these misunderstandings by discussing the things with them very clearly. As the dialogue becomes more considerate and sympathetic the roles of Tais and the parents also change becoming more and more complementary to the child's development.

To make the parents' meetings interesting

- We need to be clear about the purpose of each meeting. For example,
 - Explaining the parents the method of teaching maths and language used in Khelghar.
 - Problems faced by Adolescents.
 - How to communicate with children
 - There can be a number of purposes such as exchange of information about events in the Basti or in Khelghar and getting their cooperation. These objectives may not be achieved simply through giving instructions, information or speeches to parents. For this it is essential to get parents to participate in the discussion to understand their point of view and to get them involved in the decision-making process.
- To ensure that parents start talking in the meetings some topics related to their lives should be taken up for discussion. For example 'What makes me tense?' 'Events in the Basti', 'My dreams in the context of my children' etc.
- All the educational methods / techniques to be used with children in Khelghar are also proven successful with

parents. For example, through activities such as songs, trips, games, 'What I will do then...', picture stories, role plays, drawing, cooking and eating together etc., parents open up, develop closer ties with Khelghar and develop good relationship with Tais. For example, to help parents understand the different teaching methods used by Khelghar, we presented a children's play that revealed the difference between school, class, home and Khelghar. Such things have an effect that can never be achieved through mere speeches.

- What we want to convey to parents must be done very precisely, in a language they understand in a short time and very effectively. At the same time we need to take into account their opinions and experiences and make changes in ourselves accordingly. Achieving this requires sincere efforts and empathy.
- Tai should never complain about a child to her parents in front of everyone in the meeting. Children should never be compared. Personal information gathered about a child through our interaction with the child in Khelghar should not be shared, even accidentally in the meeting. This violates the bond of confidentiality between us and the child.

Some hits and some misses

It is the responsibility of Khelghar to remove obstacles from the path of children's learning. It is not always possible to find solutions to all the problems caused by the deprived situation of children. There are, of course some misses too. Let's look at some examples.

Rani is a frail, quiet girl of small built. She had failed in first grade. Her mother had concluded that the daughter was not good at studies and was about to stop her schooling. Khelghar Tai talked to Rani's mother and explained the things to her. Tai took efforts to make Rani want to attend Khelghar. In two-three months Rani opened up in Khelghar. She was not bad at learning. On the other hand due to her sweet disposition she became everyone's favourite in Khelghar. Khelghar succeeded in safeguarding Rani's educational opportunities at an early stage.

Another example is that of Ramesh. Ramesh who was in second grade was always quiet and sad in the classroom. He was not attentive.

When Tai made enquiries she realized that there were constant quarrels between his parents. Often his intoxicated father beat his mother and drove her out of the house. Even after talking to the father the situation showed no improvement. Then some of the female parents in the Basti along with Tai went to Ramesh's house and warned his father. These friends stood firmly by Ramesh's mother who felt reassured. Once they even lodged a complaint with the police. Ramesh's father was a little intimidated. The quarrels did not stop altogether but they did diminish. Gradually, Ramesh started enjoying the activities at Khelghar. Seeing the wide smile on his face Tai was also relieved that his childhood didn't wilt away.

We have noticed one more way that parents choose to deal with especially their sons when they feel they can't any longer handle them - they send them off to their native villages or to some hostel. They feel that by living in the hostel their son will be disciplined.

The siblings Deepak and Ram who used to come to

Khelghar regularly for 8-9 years were suddenly sent to a hostel by their parents. We knew the conditions in that hostel. In the company of the other children there these children were likely to go the wrong way. Tai explained this to their parents but the parents did not listen. We learned that we cannot do much against the parents' wish.

Parents in the urban Bastis cannot accept boys and girls talking to each other freely and learning together. Khelghar ensures co-education. Often parents do not send girls to Khelghar after fifth or sixth grade. In Spite of having frequent dialogue with them it is difficult to change their traditional perspective. Against this backdrop SavitaTai's example is to be commended. Both her daughters attend Khelghar from first grade. The elder daughter Payal was smart and sprightly. When she was in eighth grade a goon from the Basti started pestering her. He started sending her messages, letters and presents at the hands of other Khelghar children. Khelghar Tai and Savita Tai spoke to him and his family. In the beginning a calm approach was adopted. When he ignored this he was sternly made aware of the consequences. In Payal's class Tai conducted a group discussion with girls on this problem. She talked to the girls regarding how to deal with this kind of harassment from boys without getting afraid. The boys and girls in Payal's group also supported and helped her. That hoodlum boy started spreading rumours about Khelghar. Tai, however, kept on supporting Payal steadfastly. When all the reprimanding and final talks failed khelghar decided to lodge a complaint against the boy with the police. Gradually, he stopped following and troubling Payal. With everyone's help Payal was able to overcome these obstacles and focus on her studies. Later she completed her D. Pharmacy course.

A relationship of trust and understanding between parents and Khelghar can go a long way in overcoming hurdles from the children's path. Things can be different, however, if this kind of understanding cannot be developed.



Women checking the taste of saline solution at a health workshop.



Parents enjoying a balloon game

- Parents' Meeting is not a place where we and parents come together to complain about the children. This is a place, instead, to understand them and solve their problems. The purpose of our work is to make the relationship between the child and the parent more dialogic. This should be understood by Tais themselves and should also be told to the parents.

Parents like such friendly, understanding, compassionate dialogue with the Khelghar Tais. Respectful and dignified treatment received from Tais encourages them to think in an independent manner. The parents start making time for the parents' meeting if they feel comfortable there or if they can take some new ideas with them from the meetings or if they arrive at some answers to their questions at the meetings.

4) Participation in special events

Parents should always be invited to events such as Khelghar gatherings / workshops / fairs. This makes the relationship with the parents more open and strong. Such programmes are especially useful for enhancing parental involvement and group building.

5) Workshops for Parents

For raising consciousness in parents workshops on some specific topics would prove helpful. Through these workshops issues such as health, positive discipline, problems of growing up boys and girls, dialogue with children etc., can be addressed in an innovative way.

Parents' cooperation

When it was decided to start Palakneeti Khelghar classes in the urban Basti the major problem was finding a suitable place. Initially, the center was started in a place provided by one of the parents after fixing it to some extent. But after a few months it had to be vacated. It was difficult for the organization to buy or rent land as the Basti was not yet recognised by the Municipal Corporation. It was impossible to get all the necessary documents. Then with the help of other parents it was decided to build a small room using tin sheets on a tiny vacant plot. We, the middle class activists found it hard to accept the idea of building a room without buying the land and without the permission of the Municipal corporation. ``We are all with you'', the parents assured and the room was built by the parents themselves at the lowest possible cost. It was named 'Ananda Sankul'. A few days later, unexpectedly, a problem surfaced. A woman from the Basti started claiming ownership of the small plot. The dispute lasted for several days, however, the parents in the Basti handled it resolutely. A complaint letter about the woman signed by about five hundred parents was given to the police station. The unity of the parents helped in solving the problem.

In order to get the male parents to participate

The idea that children are the mother's responsibility is so firmly rooted in the society that it is mostly the mothers who attend the parents' meetings.

Conscious efforts have to be made to make the male parents attend the parents' meetings. We would like to mention one such meeting held to increase the participation of the male parents in Palakneeti Khelghar. In February 2011 it was decided to celebrate Women's Day with the male parents.

It was likely that it would be misunderstood as an attempt to summon men to speak about men's atrocities against women. It was a bold idea. Therefore, in February a parents' meeting was organized for both men and women by sending special invitations to men. In conjunction to this parent meeting an exhibition of scientific experiments, instruments made by the children was also arranged.

After seeing the exhibition it was decided that every male parent would come forward and introduce himself. After this self-introduction everyone else was to add to this description of the person. Lots of good information about parents was revealed by other women and Tais. For example, "He never fights; he always helps the

neighbours." "When I went to their house he was helping in cleaning vegetables. I liked that." "He loves children. He drops the little one off at school every day on the way to work." Other parents who knew a male parent made these kinds of additions.

The male parents were overwhelmed when such personal good things were presented in front of everyone.

Then Tai told them, "We all want to celebrate Women's Day together on 8th March this year. You are requested to talk on the topic "The most important woman in my life." Both men and women expressed willingness to talk. After this Tai started the discussion for the preparations of the March 8 programme by explaining the importance of the day. Some men and women as well as some children from the youth group came forward and talked about the most important woman in their life. These men were having a hard time putting their feelings into words. They were afraid too. Tai encouraged and helped everyone. For almost everyone it is the mother who has the highest place in their life. When a mother talked about her daughter who drudged equally alongside them for the family most people had tears in their eyes. Different qualities of women were coming to the fore on this occasion. At the end of this very touching event Lakshmi's father said, "I never spoke in the past



Participation of male parents in the parents' meeting

before a group of people like this. I feel so good. "We activists, having witnessed the consequences of the patriarchal system and carrying a kind of resentment in our minds about all men were moved by this encounter with a new persona of men and were forced to revisit our prejudices about men too. Although the attendance of male parents did not drastically increase from the next parents' meeting it was certainly satisfying that Khelghar could reach them to some extent.

The role of Tais and Dadas

The opportunities and facilities that a person gets depend on many things like their class, gender, caste and religion. In these traditional hierarchies people who are born with a higher status get many opportunities without much effort. But those who are considered inferior by birth have to face many obstacles and problems. Those who have the opportunity must expressly lend a helping hand to those who are left behind. Most importantly, Khelghar Tai/Dada must have this social parenting consciousness. This perspective gives us strength in our

effort to communicate with the children and adults in the urban Bastis. Respect, trust and understanding are very much essential for dialogue. Tais and Dadas should take the initiative to achieve it. There are many good things that need to be appreciated such as the mental strength of the labourers, their perseverance, their willingness to go the extra mile and to stand up for each other, the tough attitude assumed during times of struggle etc. Children's responsibility is of course to be taken by their parents. It is not possible for Khelghar to assume this responsibility. But we can definitely provide a helping hand both to these children and their parents who are already challenged by numerous socio-economic problems.

It must also be remembered that Khelghar work which is essentially for the children in urban Bastis, can't progress much without the support of parents. Genuine affection, co-operation and dialogue strengthens this work, sustains our zeal at work. This work for children's development endures due to the interaction with the parents.



A parent programme in the urban Basti





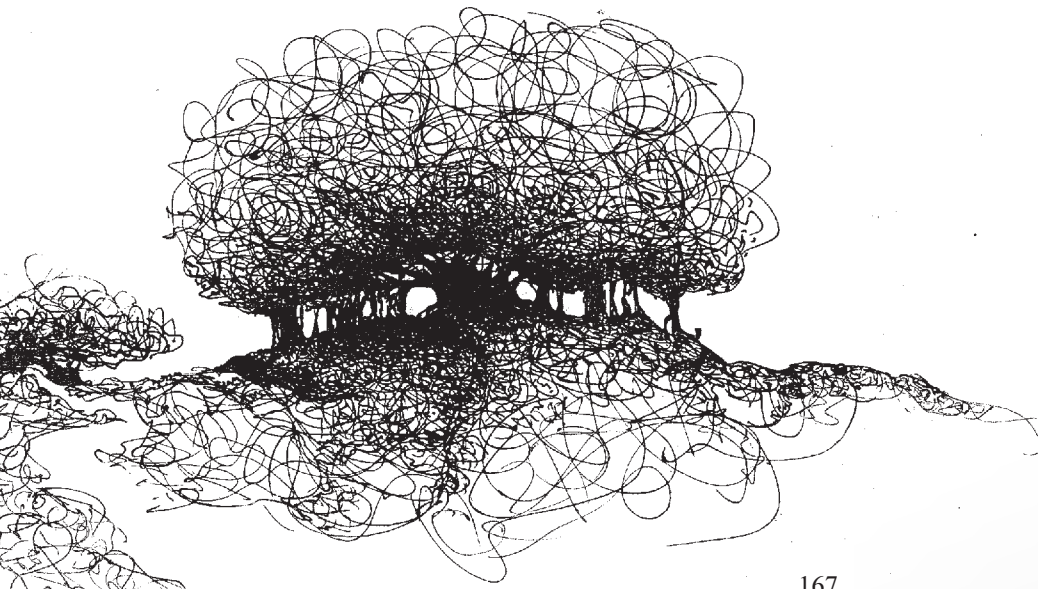
10

Special Programmes

Let's sing and dance

Teamwork teamwork,
Together we can make our dream work.
Then we'll share the joy of what we've done,
Teamwork, everyone!
It's fun to shoot the basketball through the hoop,
But if nobody passes then nobody shoots.
And the relay race just can't go on,
If nobody wants to pass the baton.
We're the parts that make up the whole,
And we've got our eyes on a common goal.
Sometimes it can be a big plus,
When a you or a me becomes an us!

JANNIGRO



Special programmes such as picnics, festivals, celebrations and projects etc. that are organised with the aim of developing life skills are very useful. It is through the medium of such special programmes that life skills such as communication skills, understanding ourselves and others, thinking consciously and taking decisions in the best interest of all, assuming responsibility for our decisions etc. can be developed.

Special programmes are also conducted in schools but they are often very stereotypical and are not given as much importance as the academic programmes. At Khelghar, however, these programmes have a special place since they have the potential to effectively embrace various opportunities for learning. How these materialise in reality depends upon the perspective and efforts put in by Tai or Dada.

In the structured systems of school, class, homework, exams etc. children do not have the leisure of doing what they feel like doing. Special programmes offer a certain freedom and space that drive away the monotony and create a joyous atmosphere. This section discusses the importance, planning and implementation of these special programmes.

Special programmes help achieve multiple objectives.

- The idea of doing something other than following the humdrum routine makes everybody happy and livens them up.
 - You can combine diverse subjects to obtain a unified result. For example, going on a trip gives the opportunity to practice map reading, learn about the region, its history, its special features etc. It is also an opportunity to observe nature.
 - The concepts one learns in textbooks can be experienced in real life. This helps in understanding and assimilating the concepts better.
 - The children as well as their Tai get the opportunity to meet and talk to different people.
 - These programmes offer several occasions for Tai and the children to talk and discuss things. This accelerates the process of bringing about a change in their perspectives. Take for example the traditions and customs followed during festivals and ceremonies. Such a subject opens up the possibility to think critically, discuss and debate and thus obtain clarity of thought for all.
 - Through this discussion, Tai and the children take the initiative to plan an event, distribute tasks, secure the cooperation of persons not directly involved, prepare in advance, actually organise the event, clear up after it is over and lastly, evaluate the whole process. Through this activity they develop many skills such as taking initiative, collaborating, doing team work, discussing things and appropriately dealing with negative emotions.
 - Children who have lost interest in learning for some reason, participate in Khelghar activities once again with renewed enthusiasm.
 - The main thing is that such programmes energise them and give them the confidence that it is possible to come together to create something nice.
- Many different types of special programmes can be planned at Khelghar. Let us consider four special programmes in this section, viz. festivals and celebrations, health communication, picnics and projects. We have tried to present these programmes through examples of how we run them at Khelghar.



Festivals – Ceremonies - Celebrations



For children, festivals mean joy... fun and frolic... wearing nice clothes... lots of food etc. When such an event is announced at Khelghar, everybody is excited and starts working together at cleaning, tidying and decorating the place. Their drawings, poems, compositions adorn the board. Their boredom and laziness suddenly disappear. They are motivated to act. They now have a concrete objective to achieve in the near future and an opportunity to work together.

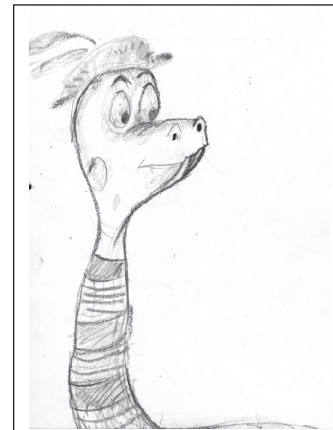
A true celebration is when everyone comes together to enjoy the occasion! The joy is in coming together, being inclusive, demonstrating our goodwill and our bonding with each other and add to this the joy of creating something new together! Songs, stories, plays, charts are created. Such concrete activities boost the children's self-image.

Children bring with them the ideas of enjoyment that are prevalent in the social environment that surrounds them. For example, children raised in urban bastis just cannot imagine a 'celebration' without dancing to the loud, blaring music played out by huge stacks of speakers. Tais and Dadas, however, may have serious objections to this. Children also love bursting crackers during Diwali. Tais and Dadas on the other hand are nature-lovers! Here, the objective is 'fun for all'. However, with such contrasting ideas, Tais and Dadas can find themselves in a dilemma. At such times, you should engage in discussions, think

critically and be ready to experiment with different ideas. The way we celebrate festivals is often influenced by the customs and traditions of the religious majority. Educational institutions like Khelghar should put into practice the value that all religions are co-exist. Along with celebrating Hindu festivals, festivals from other religions should also be celebrated. For example, the Muslim festival of Eid-e-Milad and the Christian festival of Christmas should also be celebrated.

In celebrating traditional festivals Tais and Dadas are usually opposed to the rituals, harmful customs and traditional practices and the mentality of borrowing money to celebrate the festival. But that does not mean that all of it is bad and should therefore be rejected. For example, there are nice things about celebrating Nagpanchmi¹ when girls dress up, put on bangles, draw mehendi on their hands etc. Playing on a swing, playing zimma and phugadi are also enjoyable things. But why should it be only girls? There is no harm in boys doing so too. Boys are often keen to play these games but hesitate to do so. With a little encouragement they learn to play the games well and even enjoy them. Everybody takes pleasure in cooking together and then polishing off the food later.

Now on the other hand, it is the harmful traditional practices that are wrong! E.g. to catch a real cobra and worship it on the occasion of Nagpanchami, to force it to drink milk, to keep it captive, to defang it etc. is something that must be completely avoided. Instead, making a mud replica of a cobra, discussing the origin of this practice could be a part of this celebration. One particular year at Khelghar the children gathered information on cobras and other snakes from various books on the occasion of Nagpanchami. This exercise



In the world of snakes

Book made by children about Nagpanchami

¹ Nagpanchami is a festival of snakes celebrated on the 5th day of the 5th month (Shravan) of Hindu calendar.

helped them get rid of their misconceptions about poisonous and non-poisonous snakes. They classified the information collected and each of them wrote on a chosen topic and prepared a small booklet together.

Celebrating the Ganesh festival at Khelghar

Let us see how the ways of celebrating Ganesh festival and the perspectives about it evolved at Khelghar during the period from 2004 to 2012.

‘How to celebrate the Ganesh festival?’, is the topic for debate between Tai and the children. Every year, heated discussions would take place between them before they arrive at a consensus. Initially, the children used to have their usual fixed ideas that included collecting money from the people in the basti, setting up a pandal, installing the idol, decorating the place and dancing to loud music. For about ten to fifteen days they would be completely immersed in the festivities. Besides, they would get to deal with money and would unknowingly become the decision makers. They absolutely longed for this experience!

During our discussions, the children would talk freely about all the bad things that used to happen during

Ganesh festival. At the time of the festival, they had to get along with children and youth from the basti who did not attend Khelghar, they were aware of parties that would take place from the money collected for the festival, of the disagreements and quarrels between various groups that would sometimes lead to serious fights. They would understand all of this and yet find it impossible to detach themselves from such celebrations.

Before the Ganesh festival in 2002 the children insisted that the Ganesh idol of Khelghar be installed in the basti. Tais and Dadas were not in favour of celebrating the festival the way it is celebrated traditionally. Finally it was decided to install the idol in the basti. During the ten days of festivities we all attended the aratis, partook of the prasad etc. In a way, we were not completely cut off from the children.

The following year, after much discussion the children set-up a street play that they performed before each of the Ganesh mandals. We succeeded in capturing the attention of the people for the duration of the play but the moment it was over the loud music began to play again. None of them seemed to be in the mood to talk about the play. We realised that all they wanted was to drown themselves in the blaring music.

In 2004 since Khelghar had acquired its own space we could not brush aside the popular demand of ‘installing the Ganesh idol in the Khelghar premises itself. It was now possible to change the situation a little. That year the festival was celebrated with gusto! However, the traditional components of aarti, prasad, pooja etc. remained intact! We only managed to avoid the loud music and the immersion of the idol. After the festival was over we had a discussion on ‘what did we do differently and what else could we have done?’. The children had at this point started thinking about subjects such as pollution of the rivers, noise pollution, traffic jams etc.

The following year the children were prepared for the discussion on how the festival should be celebrated. They had thought about it and were firm on their views. They had already decided that they would install the idol, decorate it, conduct the poojas and aartis, distribute prasad etc. as per tradition. They did not accept any of our suggestions except the one that not to waste too much time on celebrations as there were seven or eight children preparing for their 10th grade Board examination and we had less time on hand. Not even a single new idea regarding social awareness came forward from them.

We were a little disappointed. Yet, we changed our



The Ganesh idol installed on a fort built at Khelghar

stance. We told them that they could have their way but that they had to take all the decisions and execute them. The children agreed and decided that they would celebrate the festival on the Ganesh Chaturthi and immerse the idol on the following day. They decided to install the idol of the previous year. They also decided to contribute ten rupees each for the prasad. In the evening, the children presented cultural programmes. They did the pooja-aarti and then they prepared a large pot of poha and everybody relished it. Later that evening the children performed songs, mimicry, told jokes, danced etc. A boy from the tenth grade acted as a compere and addressed the audience in a very imaginative and endearing manner. It was a great fun!

The event was not discussed, planned, organised and executed flawlessly as was expected by the adults. There was some sulking too. However, this experience taught a valuable lesson to both the children, Tais and Dadas.

Every year there would be discussions, exchange of ideas etc. that would alter the way the festival was celebrated. Let us now jump to 2012 and see how the festival was celebrated then:

The children liked Tai's idea to make a paper-mâché Ganesh idol. They remembered the previous year's visit to an environment-friendly decoration of Ganesh idol. They soaked newspapers before pulping them. They then mixed fenugreek powder and let it soak before making a beautiful Ganesh idol of the mash. The monsoon had lingered longer that year and September was quite a wet month. The idol would just not dry. After a few days parts of the idol started



Origamy Ganasha

Priority must be given to children's choices while celebrating

Children's views are usually influenced by their surroundings. Therefore the ideas about how to celebrate festivals, parties, cinemas, picnics, gatherings etc. that are presented by them are often pre-acquired ideas. There is no harm in Tai readily accepting them either. However, she should point out and bring forth the ideas that are inappropriate for discussion. At times Tai can also express her own ideas about the celebration. Keeping in mind their interests and sensibilities if she proposes ideas of projects, workshops etc. then they would readily accept them.

During the discussion with the children it is important to understand if the children have wholeheartedly accepted what was decided or whether they are merely 'toeing the line'. Adults often think that if things are explained to children they accept. However, children communicate their disapproval verbally and also non verbally: their enthusiasm drops, they lose interest, they start talking amongst themselves, are in a rush to go home. Tais and Dadas should take cognizance of their silence, of their refusal to make eye contact and avoid the subject. Occasionally, Tais and Dadas may also be required to step back a little even if their stand is right. However, they should continue talking about the issue and encourage the children to think about it through discussion and dialogue.

Let us consider a typical example – popular film songs that children absolutely love! There's an insistence about dancing to these songs during gatherings. Often, the dance steps imitate the movements of the hero and heroine on screen. The children may not have given much thought to the emotions that the seductive movements in these songs arouse. It is the tune, the beat, the music and the popularity of the song that influence them.

Little children do not look nice when imitating the on-screen movements of the hero-heroine. It is also inappropriate. There is no harm if they dance to the songs at Khelghar sometimes just for fun. However, a frank discussion should follow with the children on the meaning of the lyrics of the song and the suggestive movements. Ask them what they liked about it and why. It is our experience that after such a discussion children insist less on performing such songs.

coming off. The children did not know what to do. The previous year during the Diwali fair, they had learnt to make origami swans. It struck them that they could make a Ganesh idol the same way that they had made swans!

Through the joint efforts of Tai and the children an origami Ganapati idol took shape and was decorated. The idol was installed in Khelghar itself. The origami fan became the sudarshanchakra¹ and they learnt how to light the origami lamps with the help of battery-powered LED bulbs. The Japanese guests present at Khelghar participated in the Ganesh pooja and the aarti. Plans were made for preparing the prasada and aartis were sung with great gusto. On the fifth day the Ganesh idol was symbolically immersed by sprinkling some water on it. To avoid the pollution of rivers the organisation 'Swachh' in collaboration with the Municipal Corporation had placed large water tanks on the banks of the rivers. The children from Khelghar volunteered to sensitise people to use the tanks kept for immersion to avoid river pollution.

It provided a platform for children to understand the origin of Ganesh festival in Maharashtra, how its objectives changed in the course of time, the politics and economics behind it etc. Children decided what all they can do to bring about changes in themselves and in their surroundings. In spite of this they did not skip going to the massive immersion procession that takes place in the city. We however understood the influence that the playing of drums, the dancing and the lighting had on them. Change takes place for sure but it takes time. We must continue to constantly work towards our objectives.

Many such festivals take place in a year. Decisions on whether to celebrate a festival or not should be taken considering the time available for children and Tais, their needs and the enthusiasm to participate. We must ensure that Khelghar doesn't end up in becoming ritualistic in celebrating festivals, otherwise they lose their charm. Celebrating traditional festivals is a good thing. But we must not forget that these are also occasions to talk traditions and their good as well as bad effects on society! Thanks to the discussions that motivate the children to examine their actions critically.

¹ Sudarshanchakra is a circular weapon in the hands of Lord Shri Krishna

'Health communication' at Khelghar



In 2008 we decided to study and work more intensively on 'Health'. Our friends, Dr. Mohan Deshpande and Vaishali Vaidya agreed to help us wholeheartedly. They are the pioneers in the field of health awareness in Pune/Maharashtra and run the group called 'Arogyabhan (आरोग्यभान)' (Health Awareness). They were already training social workers all over India on the subject of 'Dialogue on Health'. We decided to work with them for a year. Our discussions with them resulted in outlining a five-point programme:

- Cleanliness at home and its surroundings
- My body and its functions
- Nutritious diet
- Illness and the cure
- Healthcare services

The training helped all at Khelghar gain an understanding not only of 'Health Awareness' but we also learned songs, role-plays, group discussions, communication skills, how to cook nutritious foods etc. Even though health was the focal subject of this training, we had the opportunity to discuss varied related topics such as gender discrimination, public hygiene, environment, corruption in healthcare services, economic inequality and its causes, sex education, malnutrition, sex determination and female foeticide, relationships based on respect and trust etc. This greatly helped our Tais and Dadas form clearer perspectives on this subject. The book in Marathi proved very handy in understanding these concepts. They were 'Sawalitlya Goshti (सावलीतल्या गोष्टी)' and 'Jau Arogyachya Gawa (जाऊ आरोग्याच्या गावा)' authored by Dr. Deshpande and Vaishali Vaidya, and publications

from organisations like Sathi Cehat, Masoom, Tathapi, I.H.M.P. etc.

Following this training we at Khelghar worked on this subject for the entire year with various age groups of children and youth as well as with their parents.

The outline of certain activities on this subject has been detailed in the section called 'My body' in the module, "Exploring oneself" (refer to pages 137 to 144.).

Other creative activities related to Health:

The importance of wearing 'chappals' (footwear)

Young children living in bastis often do not have chappals of their own. Even if they do have chappals, they rarely wear them. In order to underline the importance of wearing chappals and to motivate them to demand their parents to buy for them Tai and the children



of the primary group walked barefoot in the neighbourhood. They noticed the kind of dirt that had stuck to their feet before washing their feet clean. The children then discussed how the dirt on to their feet could get onto their clothes, beds, utensils etc. as they entered their homes and what are the possible consequences. Tai then narrated them the story of the 'invention of chappals'. They also visited a cobbler's shop. On understanding the importance of wearing

chappals the children wrote letters to the chappal.

They made paper and cardboard chappals. They traced the outline of their feet on a cardboard, cut it out, stitched on some laces and decorated it. They then took these chappals home.

A meeting was organised with their parents on the importance of wearing chappals though very ordinary in quality. During the meeting the children demanded that they be bought chappals.

Once new chappals were purchased the children marked them with their names and learnt to arrange them neatly in rows.

So this is 'The story of the Chappal' that teaches us the use of chappals consciously and about cleanliness

Food Culture

A popular and regular programme at Khelghar is to come together to cook and eat different dishes! We began thinking of the nutritional value and the hygiene of the food. Through this activity the children could correlate what they had learnt in their science textbooks on

components of food: roti, chapati and rice have carbohydrates in them. Lentils, milk, curds, meat, fish and eggs are rich in proteins. Oil and ghee have fats whereas fruits and vegetables including leafy vegetables are a good source of necessary vitamins. This basic understanding of food made them realise what is nutritious and what is not. They learnt that they should eat carb rich foods to obtain energy and strength and protein rich foods for growth. To fight illnesses they require vitamins and essential minerals. They understood the basic components of their daily diet.

During the course of this study we had coupled each session with the preparation of a new dish both nutritious and tasty. Children generally love bhel. At Khelghar we added sprouted pulses to the traditional mixture of murmura, farsan and peanuts. The addition of onions, chillies, tomatoes and sprouted pulses like moong and moth beans increased the nutritional value of bhel several fold. Many new preparations were introduced: Laddoos made from halim seeds or millets, cucumber and tomato salad, lemon juice, juice made from kokum, aamla, raw mangoes etc., chikki made from peanuts, dates, chickpeas, rajgira etc. Initially, the children were reluctant since they had not developed a taste for these foods. Since we took care to make these items tasty and rich in nutritional value the children slowly started relishing them and began talking about them at home too. Tai has to constantly remind the children to wash their hands before eating.

The success of this programme can be judged by the incident at Khelghar when we decided to prepare poha. The children suggested that we also prepare some moth beans curry as an accompaniment to the poha so that it would not be dry to eat and that the meal would be more nutritious.

(Please refer to the activities described on page 139)

Towards gender equality

From a very young age a child becomes conscious of the fact of being a 'boy' or a 'girl' and the idea strengthens over time. Children start forming their opinions about genders and their roles based on their observations of the behaviour of men and women around them. Most of the differences observed are social. There are a very few biological differences between boys and girls. The remaining differences are purely based on social perspectives. The following activity has been designed to explain this to adolescents:

Divide the board into two halves and write 'A Girl means...' on one side, and 'A Boy means...' on the other.

Now ask the children to express their views. To begin with the boys and girls state the differences one by one but they do so shyly or sheepishly. However, gradually, ideas born out of traditions and social practices etc. start emerging. For example, girls are shy, boys are strong, boys are daring, girls are emotional etc. This should then be followed by a discussion on all the views mentioned in the childrens' lists barring some physical differences such as boys grow beards, girls' grow breasts, start menstruating and have a uterus etc.

These traditional views are socially accepted stereotypes about men and women. It is important to explain to the children through examples how these views are slowly changing. Encourage them to think. It is through this thinking process that they begin to realise how opinions of people surrounding them influence and shape their own views. Similarly, they also begin to realise that if they wish to develop just and equal relationships they will have to question and oppose prevailing traditions and they will have to bring about changes in themselves. Children tend to discuss this subject with great fervour and intensity.

This discussion enables the children to examine the misconceptions they have about men and women and to build new positive ideas. Ask them to make lists of household tasks performed by mother and those performed by father along with their respective rights and they'll begin to understand the inequalities that exist between the two genders. From their own experience and from what they observe around them they can speak of the various obstacles that they might experience in their

own development because of the differences in the upbringing of boys and girls. Girls are unable to devote time to their studies because of the need to help at home. Their growth is also limited owing to restrictions on their stepping out of the house. Likewise, since boys are never given the opportunity to do any housework skills such as hand-eye coordination, perseverance, focused attention etc. never get a chance to develop.

At Khelghar, we should make it a point to encourage boys to clean and cook while dividing the tasks. A historical review of how gender inequalities originated and how they evolved could also be presented. At the end of this activity give the children a worksheet bearing an outline of a house titled 'Happy Home' and ask them to fill in words and pictures that convey their idea of a happy home. What the children write and draw reflects what they have assimilated through all the discussions.

We should be confident that there will be changes, albeit gradually, in the behaviour and attitude of the children. For example, boys will on their own, start helping their mothers and sisters in domestic chores, will behave politely and respectfully with girls at Khelghar, will side with their mother or sisters in disagreements at home etc. and girls will speak confidently about the injustices experienced by them etc.

[References: 'Kahani Sonya Monichi ki Amchi Tumchihi' by Aalochana Prakashan; (Story of Sonya and Moni or yours and ours) and 'What is patriarchy' by Kamala Bhasin]

Health Fair

After having worked with the children at Khelghar on various aspects of health from both the physical as well as the social perspective using different approaches and methods the children, their Tai as well as their parents realised the vast scope of this subject. Learnings from these sessions were implemented in real life. They developed a certain amount of confidence about the subject. After a year the children came up with the idea of conducting a programme on health in the basti, during one of the discussions. Further discussions gave shape to the idea of organising a 'Health Fair'.

For the children, the purpose of the fair was not merely to teach others what they had learnt but also to reinforce their own learning through such teaching, to find answers to their questions, to clear any misconceptions that they may have had earlier etc. Such a programme could in fact be viewed as an 'evaluation' of these long-term projects. (Please refer to the Chapter on 'Evaluation' in Volume 2). It is like 'celebrating' the information-knowledge-



High School group children teaching younger children

understanding that the children have acquired through hard work. The 'Health Fair' organised by Khelghar in Laxminagar in May 2009 was one such celebration. Everybody started preparing for the Health Fair. Children from the youth group and their parents also decided to participate. A two-day event was planned with a procession and an exhibition to be organised as part of the fair. Preparations kicked off with great zeal - children started making posters, practising for street plays, preparing pots of medicinal plants, extending invitations, practising for the lezim performance etc. The children made posters on subjects such as diet, health, illnesses and their remedies to present them in the exhibition.

The information and pictures given in the book 'Sawalitlya Goshti (सावलीतल्या गोष्टी)' written by Vaishali Vaidya and Dr. Deshpande, were of great help in this. The children started practising songs about health. A quiz was held between two groups of children to ensure that everybody had understood the subject well. This was like a revision of what they had learnt. It was decided that the exhibition would be held in eight different corners and that two to three children would manage each of the corners. Preparations were done for demos. Various food items were prepared for the Food Fair. Discussions were held on the practical aspects of managing the event such as provision for drinking water, provision for visitors to keep their footwear, logistics for the exhibition, cleanliness of the space and other such things. Tasks were then assigned accordingly.

Arogya dindi² (आरोग्य दिंडी² Health Procession)

On the first day, we took out a 'Health Procession' in the basti. One of the special features of this procession was the lezim performance by the boys and girls of Khelghar. It was unimaginable to see the Girls from Basti playing Lezim on the road. It was allowed because of the acceptance of the sacred tradition of Dindi. They participated wholeheartedly and their performance was appreciated by all in the basti.

The children had prepared pots with medicinal plants such as tulsi or basil, lemon grass, aloe vera etc. Some of them participated in the procession carrying these pots on their heads. Flyers with information on the Health Fair were distributed. The procession would stop at each street-corner and when a sufficient number of people had gathered the children would enact street plays presenting information about the Health Fair in a rural style. The children were carrying placards with slogans such as



'Right to health is our fundamental right', 'Health is wealth' etc. Along with the children Tais and Dadas, friends and families, donors, volunteers and trainers of Khelghar had all participated in the procession. In about two hours the Health Procession had reached every nook and corner of the basti. The fair thus began with a bang!

Health Exhibition

On the following day we had organised the exhibition on health in Khelghar with corners set-up for all the activities. The exhibition was inaugurated in a novel fashion. A cardboard cutout of a small girl holding a placard with the slogan of the exhibition - 'Strength, stamina, growth, development'! written on it was kept ready. Then each child had to string a flower to make a garland which was later draped around the girl's neck to mark the inauguration of the event!

After the children presented some songs on health and Dr. Mohan Deshpande gave an inaugural speech the exhibition was opened to the parents to participate. The first corner was reserved for registration.

At the next corner the children were checking people for anaemia by examining their tongue and lower inner eyelids. If they found someone with a pale tongue or eyelids they would explain the health problems that arise out of anaemia and advised them to eat items that are rich in iron.

In the 'Diet' corner the children were demonstrating some good practices like washing vegetables before chopping them and not the other way round, covering the food with a lid while cooking, eating salads etc. Visitors at the exhibition could taste the food prepared by the children. Laddoos made from halim seeds and millets

² Arogya Dindi-

A group of Hindu devotees who are part of a larger procession going to holy sight on pilgrimage.

were on sale. The children were explaining their nutritional value to the visitors. In the next corner the children were providing information on illnesses and their cures. The entire space was decorated with posters that the children referred to in order to explain the principles of good health to parents. In one corner the children were distributing leaflets giving information on subsidised healthcare services.

Another corner was dedicated to the demonstration of home remedies on frequently occurring minor illnesses. For example, preparing oral rehydration solution, decoction etc. Information on what precautions should be taken to avoid cough and cold, vomiting, loose motions, fever etc. was also being provided. Bhel made from sprouts was being sold outside. Many friends and family members as well as parents had come especially to see the exhibition. Those who visited the exhibition were all praises for children and this encouragement lasted them for days to come.

Just as the discussion on health, information on workshops like the 'Measurement Fair' (pages 306 to 308), the 'Shop fair (pages 311-312) is provided in the section on Mathematics. Please do refer to these pages.

Picnics

A 'picnic' is a joyous occasion for children. Picnics provide an occasion to come together to play, sing songs, chitchat, eat and have a blast. They give children the opportunity to get out of their homes and experience a

different atmosphere where they don't have the stress either of their studies or of elders' expectations. They therefore open up easily. Besides the new information that they gain through the experience of travelling, the values that they imbibe by working together in a group are a treasure for life!

Children and to some extent even adults believe that picnics are just fun and play. But picnics should also be educational. Children get to discover new places, people and professions. They experience something new and different from their routine. They also gain new information. Besides, travelling and living together strengthens the bond between Tai and the children. To achieve this, Tai and the children should together discuss and decide where to go, how to plan the trip and distribute the tasks like gathering the required information, sharing of responsibilities during the trip etc. Decisions taken democratically ensure the children's cooperation. The planning should be flexible so as to accommodate changes, if required. Here is an example of an overnight picnic organised by Khelghar in 2010. This is the experience of a group of about 50 children studying in the middle and high school with 5-6 Tais and Dadas.

The recent release of the Marathi movie 'Mi Shivajiraje Bhosale Boltoy (मी शिवाजीराजे भोसले बोलतोय)' (Shivaji Rajee speaking) had added to the love that the children already had for Shivaji. Hence a picnic to the hill fort of Raigad in the Western ghats, the capital of Shivaji's kingdom was planned unanimously.

Preparations

The details of the trip started evolving through discussions between Tai and the children. These included a session on the history and geography of Raigad. The journey from Pune to Raigad was traced with the help of a map and the children also studied the changes in topography that they would notice during the journey.

Exploiting the common man's love for the king politicians often try to portray Shivaji as the Hindu king who was against the Muslims. Tai thought that the trip to Raigad would help the children truly understand this king of the people whose humanity transcended religious and caste based boundaries. To introduce this subject, Tai read Govind Pansare's book, 'Who was Shivaji?' which talks about the above mentioned points. The discussions that ensued led the children to think about Shivaji with a fresh perspective.

A boy and a girl were unanimously elected as leaders for the trip. Tasks were assigned through group discussions. The children took on responsibilities based on their



strengths and abilities and various groups were formed to look after different activities, e.g. the purchase of groceries, looking after health issues, management of the trip, cooking, serving food, clearing up after the meals etc. Each group then discussed, made a list of tasks to be performed and distributed them amongst themselves. The children successfully managed to plan and carry out the purchases. One of the groups drafted a consent letter to be signed by the parents and distributed the copies among the children. The children then took the initiative to talk to their parents and obtained permission for the picnic. Two days before the picnic the atmosphere at Khelghar was filled with joy and enthusiasm.

The picnic

On the morning of the departure the children were ready even before the adults. As soon as the journey began the children started singing songs and chit chatting. The group responsible for health had already anticipated that some children would suffer from motion sickness and had brought along Avomine tablets and plastic bags etc. Their preparations came in handy during the journey. On reaching the base of the hill all the kids eagerly got out and started climbing up. They started racing each other to the top. They reached the top in an hour and a half. After looking at the ruins and seeing how far they could see from that height they calmed down a little. In the evening everyone walked around the fort gathering fire wood. They then lit a fire in the stove. While the

group in charge of cooking prepared brinjal and potato curry with rice the others sat around the fire and sang. Later, everyone dined together under the star-studded sky. Amidst jokes and fun no one realised how much they had eaten. The group that was serving ate last. It was a great fun! After clearing up the place everybody went to bed but the children were not in the mood to sleep and continued their fun late into the night. Tired of telling them to go to sleep Tai finally gave up and joined them in the fun. The boys woke up early in the morning and bathed. The girls are normally accustomed to bathing in their underclothes in a small corner of the home used for washing utensils. For them bathing in a closed bathroom was therefore a novel experience.

At eight in the morning they all went to see the fort with the guide. Looking at the broken walls and the dislodged stones at night they were little disturbed. But the guide brought the ruins to life with his stories, songs and powadas (traditional folk songs that commemorate heroic deeds). Some of the children asked the guide questions to clear their doubts. One boy asked, “If Shivaji Maharaj was so capable and great then why did he have so many wives?”. To this the guide replied that it was the means of forming alliances with a number of small neighbouring kingdoms.”

This revealed a new dimension of medieval monarchy to the children.

They were surprised to see the large marketplace on the fort and its structure. The shops were all built on a high



Meals being prepared on the Fort



Arrived on the top of Raigad! Now for a moment's rest!

platform allowing the customers to make their purchases without having to get off the horse. Listening to the story of ‘Hirkani’ from their textbooks and standing at the place where it had occurred they all became emotional. Visiting the place where Shivaji was crowned and where once stood the Court with its canopy brought the Coronation ceremony to life. They were reminded of Shivaji’s qualities such as foresight, planning, secularism, sense of duty, affection for the common man etc. Through the discussions that followed they also realised that instead of treating Shivaji Maharaj as a deity and praying to him it would be worthy to look up to him as an ideal to bring about changes in oneself. That afternoon after packing up the group started climbing down. On their way down the children were helping each other and taking turns to carry things. One could see that they had understood the value of helping each other and assuming responsibilities. They did not feel like coming back to Pune. The fort beckoned them to come back

Expression, Practice, Evaluation

After such a trip it is important to examine ‘Did we learn something new?’. Questions such as - Was there a cooperative spirit in the group? Did autonomy and responsibility go hand in hand? Were any marked changes seen in someone? etc. were freely discussed. Tai opened the discussion by asking, “How did you find the trip?” The initial reactions were, ‘Very nice’, ‘Learnt something new about Maharaj’, ‘Such a huge fort!’ etc. Tai continued, “We had all read and heard about Shivaji Maharaj. But after visiting the fort what new information have you gained? What was the relationship between Shivaji Maharaj and his subjects? What did you discover about his nature? What did you learn about the construction of the structures on the fort and the

amenities present? Let us now present the new things we have learnt to everybody. You may use maps, pictures, essays etc. to express yourself.” The children then picked up whatever they needed from the pile at the centre of the circle and started expressing themselves. Some drew a picture of the fort, some marked all the important places and roads on a map and the rest wrote essays about their experience and the aspects that they had newly discovered.

At the end they decided to compile a book on Raigad. Three to four of them put all the essays and pictures together following a subject-wise order and bound them into a book. The title of the book was ‘Raigad through children’s eyes’.

You have now read about the three special programmes that we conducted at Khelghar - Celebration of festivals, Health communication and Picnics. All three of them are long-term programmes to be conducted in the period of a month to a year. Let us now try to understand some short-term projects that can be completed within a week or fifteen days. Let us read about how the objectives of these projects are decided, how they are planned and evaluated precisely at different stages.

Projects

The ‘Project Method’ is very useful in motivating children to take interest in a certain subject, ask questions, have the opportunity to seek answers through different media and from such activities, to obtain an overall understanding of the subject, to be able to use the information and knowledge thus obtained in their lives.

The school syllabus is organised subject-wise for the sake of convenience. But knowledge cannot be compartmentalised in this fashion. Projects are an efficient method to fuse together our daily experiences, their connection with formal learning and our practical life, in order to forge a unified understanding. This method teaches how to read, act and gain experience while focusing on the topic of the project. The information obtained is analysed through mutual discussions and children’s understanding is reinforced through presentations.

The Project Method can be implemented as follows:

- In order to develop children’s interest in a particular subject, introduce the subject through their own experiences.
- Seek information on the subject from various sources such as books, Internet, interviews etc.
- Observe, understand, study and experience how the subject is used in practical life.



Discussion and dialogue after returning from the picnic.

- Present the information thus acquired through essays, role-plays, pictures etc.

Let us try and understand how the project ‘Vegetable Market’ is developed for children between 9-12 years. Since the ability to grasp intangible ideas is not yet fully developed in children in the age group of 9-12 years we should plan projects that are built around tangible experiences.

The project of ‘Vegetable Market’

Age group: 9-12 years, Time period: 4 days, 2 to 3 hours every day

‘Eating’ is one of the important activities in our daily routine! What we eat has good and bad effects on our health. The aim of this activity is to understand the dietary habits of the children who come to Khelghar and to bring about suitable changes in them to ensure good health by explaining the children the importance of vegetables in their diet, their names, colours and taste and also their journey from the farm to their homes.

You could initiate the discussion on the subject by asking questions like, ‘What did you have for lunch today?’ ‘Which sabji did you eat?’ ‘Which sabji do you like and why?’ ‘Do you sometimes go to buy vegetables?’ etc. Tai could bring with her several raw vegetables with which she could make some salad with the help of the children. They could then all eat the salad while discussing its colours, taste, vitamins and nutrients present and so on and so forth.

You could also organise a vegetable exhibition where the children could bring vegetables from home and display them. Ensure that all types of vegetables including leafy vegetables, vegetables and tubers, roots etc. are part of the display. The exhibition will help the children familiarise themselves with the different types of

vegetables. After this basic introduction it is time to take the children to the Vegetable Market.

Preparations for the Visit

In preparation for the visit to the vegetable market, guide the children about what to observe, how to gather information, whom to meet, what questions to ask etc.

- The children and their Tai should together draw a route map from Khelghar to the Vegetable Market.
- Set up appointments with two or three vegetable vendors in advance.
- Ask the children to bring money and a bag to purchase their own vegetables.
- Ask them to make a list of the questions to be asked to the vendors.

Talk to children about what might be the daily routine of the vendor. The conversation will trigger questions in their minds. Tai should then help select relevant questions and also suggest those that do not occur to the children. A list of questions should then emerge, like the one given below:

- What is your name?
- Where do you stay?
- Where do you get your vegetables from?
- What do you do with the vegetables that are unsold?
- Which vegetables are more in demand?
- How long do you work?
- How much do you make in a day?
- How much profit do you make?
- How do you bring the vegetables here?
- How do you ensure that the vegetables stay fresh?
- How do you decide the price of vegetables? etc.

Actual visit to the Vegetable Market

People from different economic strata, age groups and temperaments come to the market to buy vegetables. Give the children pointers on observing how people

Special Projects are a Challenge

For Tai at Khelghar, such projects are a real challenge on the planning and execution front. They require a lot of preparations in advance and also need precise planning. Much effort is needed to encourage children to come forward and participate wholeheartedly and to sustain their interest in the project. Good coordination between the parents, Tais and Dadas, the donors and the guests is a prerequisite. All these challenges demand careful planning before taking any action. Tai may lose her temper because of stress and the responsibility at work or sometimes because of the indiscipline amongst children and in that anger one wrong word, an accusation or a sarcastic remark may aggravate the situation. Sometimes even if the children do not cooperate as expected or if problems arise at the last minute it is important to continue the efforts without being demoralised.

Though challenging, these situations provide excellent opportunities for the children as well as Tai to develop their skills and capacities!

Programmes for the development of life skills with some examples

Modules

- Exploring oneself
- My family
- Gender equality
- My basti etc.

Abilities developed through projects

- Gathering information
- Organising the information gathered
- Analysing the information
- Learning something new
- Presentation

Activities

- Cooking
- Gardening
- Decoration
- Conducting a survey
- Learning to ride a bicycle
- Cleanliness
- Repairs

Celebration of Important days

- Annabhau Sathe Jayanti (Birth Anniversary)
- Gandhi Jayanti
- Ambedkar Jayanti
- Independence Day
- Earth day
- Women's day
- Labour day

Celebrating festivals

- Ganesh festival
- Diwali
- Christmas
- Eid

Health

- My body
- Cleanliness
- Diet
- Illnesses
- Healthcare services

Visits

- **Visits in the neighbourhood**
 - Cobbler's shop
 - Cow pen
 - Exhibitions
 - Dispensary
 - Vegetable market
- **Day-long excursions**
 - Places of historical significance: forts, palaces etc.
 - Places of natural beauty
 - Geographical excursions: dams, hills, beaches etc.

Learning skills and abilities

- Thinking
- Observation
- Reading and comprehension
- Writing
- Questions and answers
- Taking notes
- Concentration

Special programmes

- Market fair
- Annual function
- Reading fair
- Art exhibition

Theme based 'Khelghar' activity

- Geographical concepts such as rain, rivers, trees.
- Geometric concepts such as circles, patterns, triangles.
- Value notions such as cooperation, discipline, respect, trust.
- Social problems such as addiction, violence, inequalities.

select their vegetables, negotiate the price with the vendors, how the vendor weighs and measures the vegetables, how he talks to his customers etc. Through their observations the children automatically pick up certain styles and methods.

Encourage the children to observe the following elements: the appearance of the vegetable market, the ratio of male and female vendors, the ratio of male and female customers, whether vegetables are being sold on permanent stalls or carts, what kind of weighing scales are being used, which vegetables are more in demand, which vegetables are expensive and which are inexpensive, are any customers getting lesser quantities than what they have paid for, how are the vegetables being marketed, what is written on the scales and what does it mean, how do the vendors do such quick calculations etc. Encourage the children to talk to the vendors based on the list of questions prepared in class and buy vegetables to enrich their experience of this visit. Conduct a discussion in class on all these minute observations. You can also steer the discussion to the layout of the market and how it can be changed. Similarly, you can ask the children to present their learnings in the form of a role-play between the vendor and the customers.

Going beyond...

If the children are willing and if time permits you can explore the subject beyond this visit. You could hold discussions in line with the topics introduced in the textbook such as illness linked to the absence of green vegetables in our meals, the importance of having tri-

coloured meals etc. If the subject is 'crops', you could talk about the availability of water for cultivation, weather, seasonal vegetables etc.

Songs, stories, puzzles on the subject could also be part of the class at Khelghar. You could also take reading and writing exercises on it.

- Mathematical concepts such as profit and loss, measurements, buying and selling could also be covered.
- The children could plant vegetables in some pots at Khelghar and observe how they grow.

Review and Evaluation

The following activities can be carried out to evaluate which of the objectives set for the market visit have been achieved and which have not.

- Making lists of names and adjectives of vegetables.
- Drawing a meal plate.
- Drawing up a weekly schedule for buying vegetables.
- Getting each child to write a letter to his/her parents on 'The changes that need to be made to our diet'.
- Giving the children the opportunity to write poems, stories, puzzles on vegetables.
- Getting the children to fill up a weekly food chart to see if there has been any change in their daily diet.

The important point here is to see the expected changes in the behaviour of the children. This may include the children happily eating vegetables every day, being curious about their surroundings, being capable of critical thinking etc.! All these changes are long-term changes and Tai will notice them through her yearlong observations of the children and also through discussions with their parents.



Negotiating with the vegetable vendor



A visit to a Lane where artisans make things from Bamboo/Cane

Like the ‘Vegetable Market’ visits could also be organised to a cobbler’s shop, to an umbrella repair shop, a bicycle shop, a fire station, a market where only grains are sold etc.

Organise a market with the children where you could use objects that are easily available, pseudo currency notes etc. Ask the children to prepare boards, advertisements and slogans to attract buyers to their shops. Children enjoy using words that are used in the actual markets and love shouting loudly to advertise their merchandise and attract customers.

Prior to this ask the children to set up rate lists for their products. The price should be indicated in round figures and items below ten rupees in value should be preferred. If more expensive things are selected their price should be indicated in multiples of five or ten. After the transactions are over ask the children to record the stock in hand and tally the amount received. This gives them good practice in book keeping and tallying and also revises their mathematical concepts of addition, multiplication and division. (For more information, please refer to the section on ‘Mathematical Harmony’ in Volume 2)

Any understanding that results from an open discussion about everyone’s experience is always thorough and long lasting. Ask the children what they did, what they liked the most, what they remembered etc. once the activity is over.

A game of ‘What will I do if...?’ could be played after this. A number of subjects can be proposed for discussion

such as: ‘My friends are after me to shop with them in a mall’, ‘I liked the advertisement for a cold drink/ face cream’, ‘I was told that things were being sold very cheap in a sale’, ‘You are an officer and you have received an architectural plan of a market for approval’.

Such discussions help Tai to understand what the children like and what they remember well. Concepts that they may not have understood properly can be discussed again till they are firmly rooted in their minds. After a discussion on ‘needs’ and ‘luxuries’ they could be encouraged to think about what is appropriate and what is not.

Other subjects for carrying out such projects at Khelghar could include: I myself, Family, Relationships, Gender equality, Elections, The art of advertising, The use of Facebook/the Internet, Weather and climate, Maths in practical life, My basti, My village etc.

Strength of special programmes lies in bringing everyone together, boosting their imagination, instilling a sense of responsibility and to spread joy. Special programmes might cause a lot of confusion, chaos and sometimes even fights. And since their management demands a great deal of the teacher’s time and energy there might be a tendency to avoid such programmes. By doing so you are in a way cutting off a breath of fresh air from the children’s lives. However, if you decide to implement them thoughtfully and creatively they prove a big step forward in the teaching-learning process.





11

Some valuable tips!

Let there be

Let there be a garden
where seeds can be sown,
to water sprouts with care
and to watch them grow.

Let there be beloved ones
near and dear,
Grandma to tell stories
And Aunt to cheer.

Let there be food and shelter
for every living being;
clothes to wear with warmth
and a happy home to live.

Let there be a school,
a place to rejoice.
let there be a playground
to play and to get soiled.

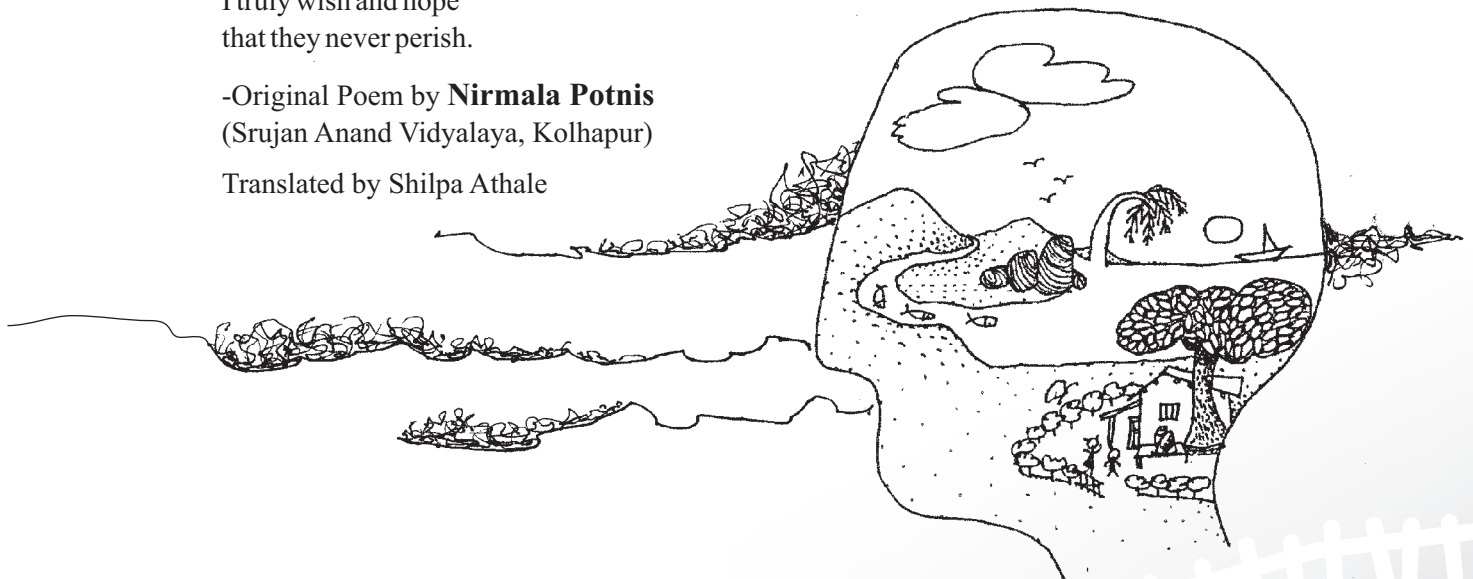
Let the sea be salty
and the river water sweet.
Let there be green mountains
as far as eyes can see.

Let there be an open space
to sing and dance and paint.
Let there be a stage to act
and a skit to present.

These are a few things
I want to cherish.
I truly wish and hope
that they never perish.

-Original Poem by **Nirmala Potnis**
(Srujan Anand Vidyalaya, Kolhapur)

Translated by Shilpa Athale



In this section we would like to talk to you about certain tools that will motivate children to think and will gently open the doors of their consciousness. These tools come in handy for a wide range of purposes: from understanding their interest areas to offering them detailed information on a topic and also from understanding their likes and dislikes to suggesting the way forward that will be beneficial for all. They help in achieving the following four objectives: sharing new information in the learning-teaching process, skill development, giving thinking an impetus and development of attitudes.

The tools introduced in this chapter can be better used with children above 10 years. You can also work with children in the age group of 6 to 10 by toning down the difficulty level of these activities.

1) Ripples

When Tai or Dada and children at Khelghar come together their minds are often still preoccupied with what has happened earlier. Therefore, it becomes difficult for some of them to take interest in group activities. At such times, this tool can help you bring them into the realm of studies. Let's see how this is done.

Ask everybody to sit in a circle and to summarise in one word what is there on the top of their mind at that point. A diverse set of words is thrown up by doing so. For



example: boredom, book, playground, anger, friendship, hunger, curiosity etc. This allows each one to understand what is going through the other person's mind and what his or her mood is likely to be. This helps develop an understanding about each other.

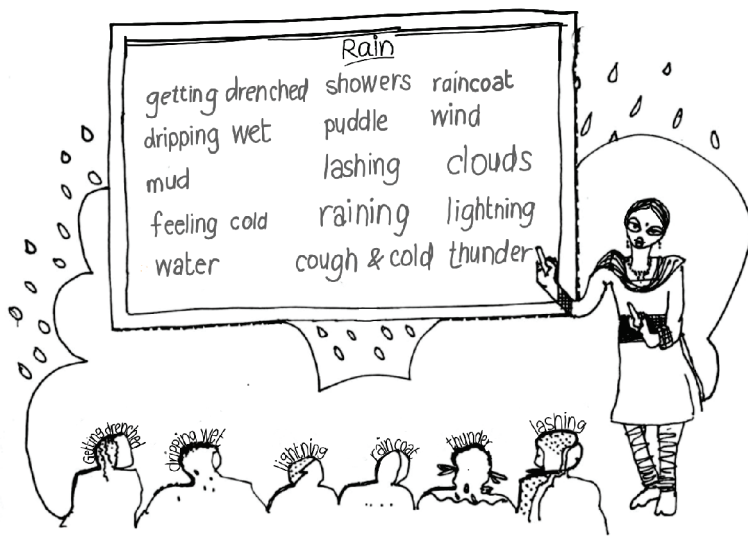
You can add fun to this activity by asking each child to enact the word that describes what he or she is thinking of and the others to guess the word. They have three chances to do so. You can also divide the children into two groups and give marks to the group that correctly identifies the word. This game helps children express whatever is preoccupying their minds and then they find it easier to move on to studies.

2) Mind mapping

Write down on the board the name of the topic on which you plan to work today in Khelghar. Ask the children what all comes to their minds when they see the word. Then make a list of all the words suggested by the children. Tai or Dada should also suggest some pertinent points.

For example: Let's take 'rain' as the topic. Children will come up with different words. Getting drenched, dripping wet, feeling cold, mud, puddle, water, streams, showers, drops, lashing, raining, cough and cold, raincoat, wind, clouds, lightning etc. From these words that the children suggest, not only do we understand what they are thinking of but we also understand the level of their prior knowledge of the topic. This allows Tai to connect the topic on which they wish to work with the day to day life of the children.

The next step is to categorize the words suggested by the children. This categorization can be grammar-wise such as nouns, verbs, adjectives etc. or subject-wise such as language, science, geography etc. With the help of these words as guiding lines we can then introduce core concepts. Now ask the children to select any one word written on the board and to speak about it. Children will naturally express the thoughts that come to their mind in the context of this word. Discuss the meaning of the word with them. In the above-mentioned examples, 'cough and cold' allows us to talk about the illnesses in the rainy season, 'getting drenched, dripping wet' help us speak about our experience of the rains, 'Mud and puddles' allow us to talk about the inconveniences of the rainy season, 'thunder and lightning' help us introduce



the topic of science and so on and so forth. If 4-5 concepts come up during this activity we can either take up one of them for discussion with the children's consent or direct the flow of the discussion towards a concept that Tai has already decided. We can also at times divide the children into 4-5 groups and give each of the groups a core concept on which they can reflect and make a presentation. This is a valuable tip that can help you introduce life skills or any new concept from their textbooks.

3) Songs and prayers

When meaningful words are accompanied by a musical note, a tune, a rhythm or a melody, our minds slowly open up to let in a wave of excitement and inspiration. Several of our inner experiences, information, opinions, perception get connected to each other to help form an 'understanding'. In the journey that takes place in the realm of consciousness at Khelghar the use of these musical tools is beyond dispute.

Children love to listen to songs, to enact them or dance to their tune. An extraordinary energy is created when they sing and enact, with great enthusiasm, nursery rhymes or songs in their mother tongue or songs from their culture. That is why Tai or Dada must be skilled at singing songs and enacting them. Children need to be taught to sing action songs in tune and to practice them together.

Children get completely immersed in singing, enjoy dabbling with words and its musical notes and forget everything else for a while. In addition it also touches their minds, refreshes their hidden memories and emotions.

Prayers

The role of prayers is very different from that of songs and poems. Prayers reflect longing, gratitude and pure truthfulness! When one can experience these emotions to some extent the mind becomes calm and one can derive renewed energy. Praying helps us focus and slow down the pace of our thoughts. Starting the day or an activity with a beautiful and melodious prayer leads us towards positivity.


The choice of prayer is crucial. Prayers that speak of the well-being of all and generate positive energy should be chosen.

Prayers are often humble requests to God. Those who believe should certainly recite such prayers at home. However, we should not take this belief in God for granted nor should we insist or promote it. We should in fact initiate a dialogue with the children on the notion of 'God'. 'It is not God that created man but man who created 'God' because it made him feel secure. 'Praying is also a way of guiding our thoughts and deeds in the right direction.' This is the perspective that we should inculcate in children. This approach questions blind faith and encourages children to think. Our prayer is not a request to God or any person but a wish for the good of all leading our thoughts in a positive direction.

It is not at all mandatory to begin every day at Khelghar with a prayer. But we could begin by praying on certain days. If we repeat the same prayer everyday children end up memorising it. Though there are benefits of memorising something, there are certain disadvantages as well, like reciting it only through habit without emotion or without understanding its meaning. Hence, reciting the same prayers year after year may render them very clichéd. It is Tai's responsibility to introduce various prayers that lead the children onto the path of humanity that speak of gratitude and are meaningful.

Explain the meaning of the prayer before asking the children to recite it. Clarify the meaning of the words that are difficult to comprehend in the context of the prayer. Ensure that the children understand the meaning and experience the emotion that the prayer conveys.

Certain topics can sometimes be introduced through prayers. Let's try to understand with the help of an example. It was the last day at Khelghar for seventh and eighth grade kids. Tai's plan was to evaluate the progress of the year gone by and to work towards fixing resolutions for the year to come. The activity started off with a beautiful prayer. There was a flower decoration at



"Words have energy and power with the ability to help, to heal, to hinder, to hurt, to harm, to humiliate and to humble."



-Yehuda Berg

the centre on which was placed a lamp. Tai and children were sitting in a circle around it. She then said to them, "Appeal to your inner strength and energy through this prayer," and recited the following prayer:

Give me the strength lightly
to bear my joys and sorrows.

Give me the strength
to make my love fruitful in service.

Give me the strength
never to disown the poor
or bend my knees before insolent might.

Give me the strength to raise my mind
high above daily trifles.

And give me the strength
to surrender my strength
to thy will with love.

By Ravindranath Tagore

When children calmed down after reciting the prayer Tai moved on to use the 'Mind mapping' tool. Being the last day of the year Tai wanted children to make some resolution, therefore she asked, "Give me all the words that come to your mind when one pronounces the word 'Resolution'. The children came up with a lot of words such as desires, dreams, efforts, preparation, courage, fear, tension, progress, development etc.

Later, they had to work in groups. Each group had to choose one word from amongst those noted on the board and draw pictures or write about it on the boards. In fifteen to twenty minutes all four boards were completely decorated. The group that chose the word 'effort' drew a horoscope and added the words such as studies, work, habits, reading etc. to it. It was a horoscope of efforts!

The group that chose the word 'dream' drew Nature, trees, a house covering half of the board and wrote words like 31st December, alcohol, partying, firecrackers and brawls written on the other half. At the bottom they wrote "How do we fulfil our dreams in such circumstances?" Everybody gathered in front of each of the boards to understand what the respective groups wished to express. In the discussion that followed children also spoke about their personal resolutions.

A prayer, a song or a poem can lighten up an activity at Khelghar. It is upto Tai to constantly strive to get such select material.

4) Creating/completing a story.

This tool is immensely useful in language skills and cognitive development.

- This is a language game where everybody sits in a circle and one person states a sentence, the next one adds another sentence to the first one, thus building a story together. For example, the first girl says, ‘There were two children.’ The next child may add, ‘A boy and a girl.’ The following person can give a completely different turn to the story. ‘They were siblings.’ And so on and so forth. Each person can twist the story her/his way. Such as ‘One day he went to attend the village fair.’ Or ‘They were on their way to school.’ Or even ‘They always got into fights.’ etc. They can let their imagination go wild in this game. It helps children to understand how group process works. Children can change the flow of the story when it is not moving in the right direction. They realise that their sentence has the ability to do so. If a group has to create a nice story together they must have creativity and have a positive outlook. A beautiful story thus weaved by the group is like a creative art. This kind of activity inculcates skills like taking initiatives, collaborating etc. in children.

- To kindle children’s imagination you may tell them the first half of a story and ask them to complete it. You should stop at a point which opens up different possibilities of taking the story ahead. From the scenarios that children suggest one can gauge their way of thinking. A child with negative thoughts may also benefit from positive alternatives being put forth by the other children. One must certainly discuss how children think once this activity is through. We can also direct the story



Story time

in two distinct directions such as, ‘If the story were to have a happy ending’ and ‘If the story were to have a sad ending’.

There is an inherent potential in the events that take place at home, school and in society to trigger critical thinking and fruitful discussions. Such events have a serious impact on the child's sensibility. Let’s take a look at the following event as an example.

“There’s a girl named Vasanti who lives in our basti. She has three siblings. Despite being eight years old her parents haven’t enrolled her in a school. Everyday at 11 in the morning all her neighbouring kids get ready to go to school in their uniforms and with their school bags. Vasanti just stands in the door looking at them. She too wishes to go to school but has a lot of housework to do. Her day is spent in cleaning vessels, washing clothes, helping in the kitchen, looking after the baby etc. She has no time to play. Of late even her friends have stopped calling her out to play with them. She too feels, ‘I just can’t play!’ She sits alone in the house with the baby in her lap. Her mother is often ill. Her father takes to alcohol a lot. In fact she is determined to speak to her father about enrolling her in a school. But he always comes home drunk. She gets very scared of talking to him in that state and her resolve remains unexpressed.”

After having read out this story to the children ask them what they think will happen next. “Vasanti grows up, lags behind her peers, gets married, has children at a very young age...” This is the chain of events that the children have seen around them and hence we get responses on these lines from them. Ask them a question that will take the story forward in a positive direction: “Imagine what will happen if Vasanti gets a chance to attend school?” The children’s responses will now change the flow of the story to make it more hopeful. Then, ask the following questions:

- Will this be possible?
- What will Vasanti have to do to make this possible?
- What can her mother do to help?
- Since you are her friends, what all can you do to help her?
- What role can Khelghar have in this?

With such a direction given to the activity children automatically come up with appropriate solutions. They gain confidence knowing that if they try they can overcome difficult situations and that if they have a sincere desire to achieve better things they will always get help to do so.

5) The curiosity corner

When children enter Khelghar, 'The Curiosity Corner' is the one place that arouses their curiosity.

One day, Sapna noticed a peacock feather placed in the curiosity corner. She was dumbfounded on seeing its bright colours. She drew the feather and tried filling in the colours but no matter what, couldn't replicate them. She then asked Tai, "How did the peacock get such beautiful colours?"

After the class was over Tai took out a book on Nature entitled 'Aapli Srushti Aaple Dhan (Our Nature, Our wealth)' and along with Sapna read the information it had on peacocks. The following day they shared this information with the others. Sapna realised, 'We may not be able to recreate the beautiful and bright colours of Nature with the help of artificial colours in our colour boxes since Nature is full of life and so are its colours!'

There is no limit as to what you can place in the curiosity corner. But if the object is new to the children or different from what they are used to see then they will be curious, will have questions and thus will begin their journey to explore and learn. E.g. You can place things that are found in our natural surroundings such as flowers, leaves, twigs, stones, thorns, insects, earthworms, beans, seeds, grass, sand etc. or man made things such as coins and notes of different countries, tickets, pictures, cloth, books, toys etc. You can arrange them in an attractive layout and can also write down the object's name or a question about it next to the object. Tai once placed a bottle containing a big dead cockroach in the curiosity corner. She asked everybody to observe it in silence. She then proceeded to separate each and every organ of the dead insect with the help of a scalpel. "While studying science, this particular method of observation that is used to understand the anatomy of animals is called 'dissection'", Tai explained. Some of the children ran off disgusted but the others took great interest in the process. 'Cockroaches' became the



topic of discussion for that day's class.

One day Suraj walked in with a snakeskin for the curiosity corner. Since then the curiosity corner did not remain just Tai's responsibility. Children were also now part of it. Of course this doesn't mean that you have to approach a subject using this method every single time. The main reason behind using this tool is to give children the opportunity to discover new and different things from which they can learn and become more aware! Once at the beginning of the class Sameer drew everybody's attention to an insect sitting on the wall. "Now just watch, it's about to excrete." And it really did! To be able to observe keenly is an important skill that one must possess.

6) Improving observation skills

This skillset has been completely ignored in the school syllabus and it is unpardonable. At Khelghar we take a lot of efforts to develop children's language and observation skills.

Learning to observe

If we take the verb 'to see' it is a pretty straightforward act! We keep seeing so many things without even being aware of them. We get information from this and we use it too. However, in order to learn to 'observe' carefully you must make a special effort.

Some activities that you can carry out -

- In order to help children closely observe something make a mental note of their observations and think about it. You motivate the children to talk about the object that they have observed. The form of leaves, the structure of a spider's web, the layout of the benches in a classroom etc. are the things whose structures can be observed and their interconnections, their consistencies and inconsistencies can be analysed.
- make a mental note of the changes inside the classroom and outside in Nature.
- recall the visuals of things you have seen and draw them.

Drawing the children's attention to their surroundings

Children see a lot of things around them; they play with and talk about them. Tai must also actively participate in this process if these observations are to be strengthened. Tai usually visits a lot of places along with the children when they go for picnics and work on projects undertaken by Khelghar. During these outings Tai can draw their attention to trees, animals, birds, insects, human beings, their attire etc. and talk about these elements.

If it is something that the children have seen before then

you can ask them to share their observations and you can share your opinions about them too. Informal chats and discussions can help retain these observations for a longer time. Otherwise, they are likely to fade away after some time. A lot of things can be discussed based on these observations. Children learn to enjoy this process with each other's help. They can find inspiration to recollect their own memories and thoughts after listening to the experiences shared by others.

Drawing things that one sees

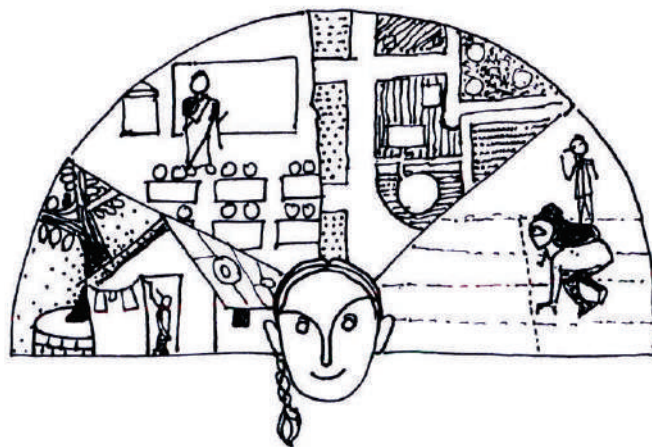
You can select various topics such as those listed below -

- house, classroom, school, streets, playground, surrounding area...
- festivals, ceremonies, markets, fairs
- different types of faces
- flat, round, flying objects
- memory drawing of a trip
- one's own reflection in the mirror
- a favourite person, place, picture, book, animal or bird...

This helps refresh the images of things seen before. Voids in those images are filled up with the help of our imagination. Thus, when one observes the same thing or object again one tends to observe it more keenly than before. Choosing topics that are close to children's emotional space makes the activity more interesting.

E.g. The things that children notice on their way home from school. This activity can be carried out in the following sequence -

- Firstly, ask the children to sit in a circle and tell them to 'recollect and talk about all that they see on their way home. Make a list of these things on the board. If you tell



the kids that no word should be repeated then they really make an effort and excitedly come up with varied words.

- Later, ask each child to talk about one thing that he/she likes the most on the way home. In order to get them talking ask them questions like - 'Why do you like it? What is it made of? What is it used for?' This discussion helps children enter the world of visual images.

- Now ask them to draw a picture of the street. While they are drawing children sometimes get bored or distracted if they do not recollect enough or if their attention is diverted somewhere else. At such times talk to them to encourage them.

- You can arrange all their drawings in the classroom and do a picture reading activity with them.

- You can ask children to make cards with words listed on board and then get them to categorise these cards.

Using one's imagination one can come up with several such games.

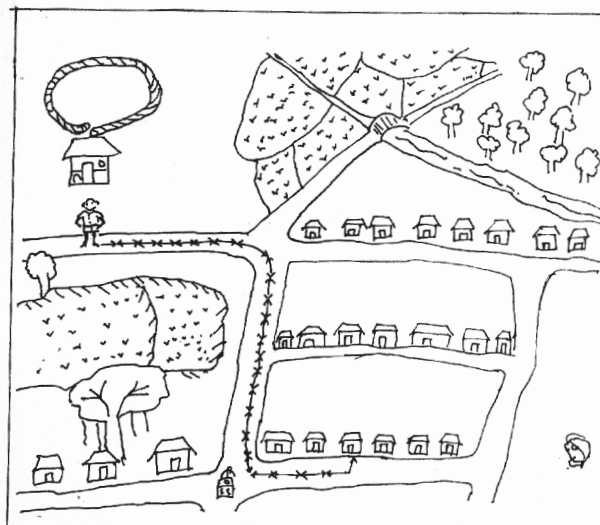
Noticing difference as well as change

We visit several places everyday. We see so many things over and over again. Every single time there is something about them that has changed. If one tries to look closely at these changes then one can develop one's observation skills. For example, at the beginning of the month of March Tai asked some fourth grade children what changes they had noticed in the trees. The kids started thinking, 'What is it that has changed? The trees look wonderful!' During the tour that followed Tai pointed out the blossoms of the mango tree, the flowers in full bloom on the silk cotton tree, the yellow brush like flowers of the Lebbek tree to the children. When they saw almond trees sprouting new leaves after the fall they realised how enjoyable this activity was. In this way, you can draw their attention to various changes such as those mentioned below.

- Changes in the sky from dawn to dusk
- The sky, the trees when it's windy or stormy



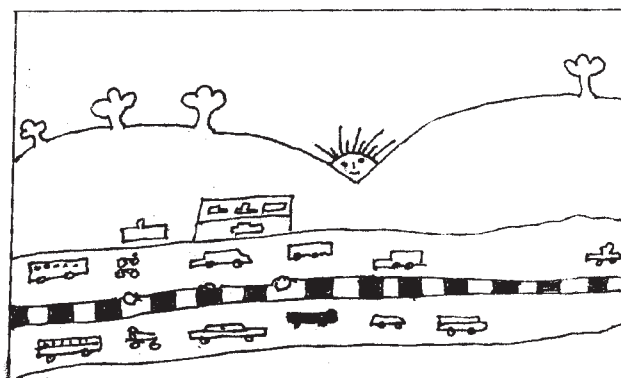
A good teacher teaches children 'where' to look and not 'What' to look at!



- The Nature in different seasons
- Changes happening in the school, at home or in the village on account of festivals or ceremonies
- Changes at home or in school because of the arrangement of furniture and objects
- Changes in a space before and after construction
- ● You get a lot of picture puzzle books in the market. They contain puzzles where you have to detect the differences between two seemingly identical pictures. Children can themselves prepare such puzzles and share amongst themselves to solve them.
- There is another game that can be played by dividing the children in pairs. Each child stands in front of the other and the pair then observes each other for a minute. Afterwards both of them have two minutes to move to a place where neither can see the other and to make changes to their appearances. When they come back each one has to guess the changes in the other person.

7) Map

Even before the children understand the meaning of the word 'map', it enters their life by way of geography lessons! Therefore the words 'geography' and 'map' get interlinked in their mind.



This is how a 'map' presents itself through their minds!

But to limit maps only to geography is not right. Maps exist in children's minds from a very young age. This is clearly seen in pictures that they draw. Their pictures speak not only about their surroundings but also about how they imagine those surroundings. However, the school curriculum fails to connect these two kinds of maps. Therefore the word 'map' remains a distant concept for the children. They find it hard to grasp.

Maps form an integral part of all branches of architecture and engineering. They also play an important role in the fields of environment, tourism, transportation as well as photography, dance, drama and cinema. In short, maps are inevitable when we wish to study the reality that surrounds us and enrich it with our imagination to create something new. The language of maps also comes in handy in everyday situations. It is an indispensable tool while searching for an address, while travelling, seeking information on a new region, constructing a house or getting furniture made, decorating an office or a home. In today's times it is crucial to be able to understand 'Google maps' in a lot of professions.

Learning to draw 'maps'

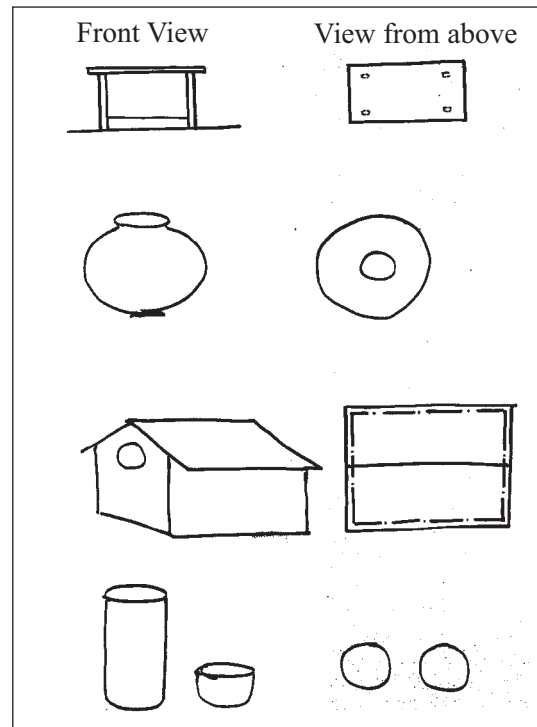
A 'map' is a standardised picture of land or objects on the ground, of buildings etc. as seen from above. The following activities can be carried out with children in order to train them to draw maps.

Maps of objects

Start with small objects like jars, stools, tables etc. Ask children to draw these objects based on how the same objects appear when observed from front and from above.

Observing from above

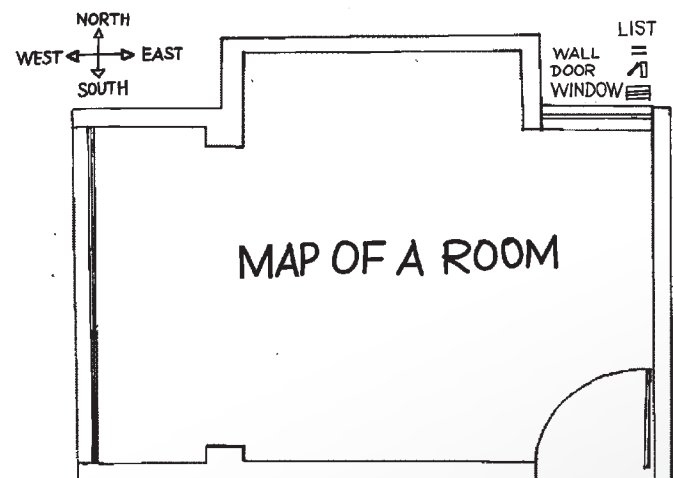
In order to understand this 'view from above' a trip to a nearby hill is very useful. On the way up to the hill when you turn back to look down you realise that the view keeps changing. Houses and roads seem tinier, their walls that were noticeable before disappear and all you now see is their rooftops. When you reach the top of the hill the range of your view widens. The 'bird's eye view' of roads, people, houses and vehicles below looks very appealing. What you see when looking at a wide range of area from an altitude such as from the top of a hill or from the terrace of a building is actually that area's map. While looking at the surroundings from an altitude you can talk to the children about a number of topics viz. searching for things that are familiar to them, searching for important locations of the village, closely observing the layout of



roads etc. and you can associate these observations with their memories and experiences.

Naming a ready-made map and placing objects on it

For this activity, draw only the outline of the maps of places that are familiar to the children and hand out photocopies of these drawings to them. The place chosen should be in front of the children's eyes. They can look at it and place the different objects on the map. For example, give them a drawing with the outline of a room with its doors, windows and walls. The children will then fill in objects such as the table, the board, the cupboard, the benches in their designated places on the



map. In other words, they will complete the map as per the actual layout of their classroom.

You then may divide the children into two groups and ask them to 'change the layout of the objects in the classroom and mark those changes on the map'. Such activities allow children to explore different kinds of maps. And in fact these maps can be carefully compared to the actual surroundings. In short, this activity prepares them for reading maps.

Drawing maps of an actual location

In a way, drawing maps of closed spaces may be easier than drawing maps of structures in open spaces. The latter is much more complicated. You must lay the groundwork first and then ask the children to draw maps.

To begin with, always choose a place that the children are familiar with. E.g. a classroom, a playground, a house etc. The example of the classroom is perfect to begin with. It is usually more difficult to draw a map of the space in which we sit as compared to drawing the map of objects. Basically how does one 'observe the room from above when all one can see is but its roof?' This question is bound to pop in their heads. You should therefore explain to them beforehand - "Let's imagine that this classroom has no roof. Now try looking at the classroom exactly like you were peeking into a well. Remember that you are not doing it from some corner of the room but from above like a plane hovering over the room."

The next step is to decide symbols. You can discuss and fix these along with the children. Based on how the object looks from front and from above they can decide on a composite image to represent it.

For example,  for a door and  for a window.

After having finalised these symbols draw a map on the board with the help of the children. Once you've ensured that they have clearly understood this process ask them to draw a map of a room in their house as homework.

These activities not only help the children to understand maps but also to understand what aerial view means.

You may then work with them on maps of various routes such as from home to school, from school to a picnic spot etc. While on a trip maps will help the children to understand the directions, the natural features of the region they are visiting etc. You can then go from my house, my basti to my country and eventually to the world. Do refer to 'My address' (page 134) in the section 'Understanding Oneself' of this handbook.

You should also make it a point to teach the children the various global standards that are in place and are used for

reading maps such as directions, colours and what they stand for, indexing, proportions etc. This will ensure their familiarisation with the maps in their geography textbooks.

7) Understanding nuances of words

When we speak and write we use simple words like 'Yes - No' in certain places and more complex words like 'comprehension, grasping' in other places. However, when we do not know the meaning of that particular word we find it difficult to continue the conversation or reading. For example, in the sentence 'Now I understand the essence of this word', if the meaning of the word 'essence' itself is not clear how can one understand the sentence ?



At times there is a history behind certain words or there is a social, political, economic context to them. Consciously looking at these words with an understanding of all the contexts is an interesting process.

When using this tool with the children write down on a piece of paper words that they normally hear and use but may not have understood clearly. E.g. discipline, punishment, respect etc. Distribute these chits of paper amongst the children and initiate a discussion in pairs.

When the time allotted to the activity is up each child will explain to the group his understanding of the word followed by a group discussion. Tai is expected to know



the meaning of all the words and to have noted down their synonyms so as to be in a position to help those having difficulties.

Let's have a look at two different examples from Khelghar.

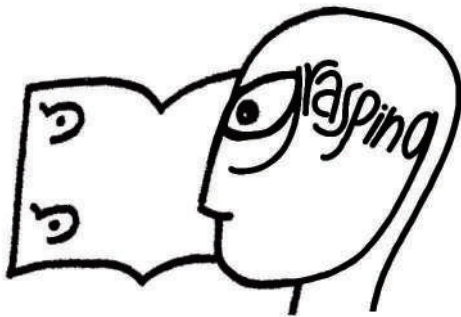
Two fourth graders, Vinod and Raja, got a chit with the word 'Good'.

Tai asked them, "Tell us when do you feel good?"

"We feel good when you teach us, Tai. And we're happy when we understand."

"But Tai, when we go on a trip and get to swim, we feel even better or let's say that it feels great!"

"The rangoli that Gauri drew yesterday was good, it was



'okay' actually."

"When you get up early and go for a walk, you feel good or you feel fresh," Tai added that the word can also be used sarcastically such as when we say, "Good god! Look at yourself!" "During Diwali, when my mother gives me an oil massage, I feel really good."

Then Tai wrote down on the board all the contexts in which we use the word 'good'. The children soon realised that we use it to describe a myriad of emotions ranging from 'great' to 'alright' in the context of touch, taste, visual, voice and smell. We have to find exact adjectives to describe each of these nuances. For example, a beautiful rangoli, a rich experience, a lovely breeze etc.

Radha and Laxmi got a chit with the word 'respect'. They said, "One must always show respect towards elders, Tai." "What we mean is that we always behave respectfully with those whom we love but also fear a little." So Tai asked, "Tell me, when you say 'fear', do you mean you feel intimidated by this person? And if yes, do you think you should call this 'respect'?" "No, that's not what we mean. If we are intimidated by someone, we don't really approach them. We approach people for

whom we feel respect. We feel like behaving in a way that will please them." We noticed that the children had understood the positive meaning of the word 'respect'.

"Tai, it is not necessary that all adults are nice to us. So if we don't trust them we will behave politely but we will have no respect for them."

"When we say that we behave respectfully, what exactly do we do?" asked Tai to throw more light on it.

"It means, Tai, that we don't answer back or insult them."

To this Tai added, "Do you think it is only the young ones who must respect the elders?"

"No Tai, elders must also treat us with respect."

"Tai, you do not hit us or insult us. That means that you treat us with respect, right?"

"Correct. Elders also need to treat younger people with respect. In fact, we should all treat each other with respect. 'Respect' is not a mere word but a value that teaches us 'how to behave'. Most importantly, it is not just a question of respecting others but also of respecting yourself," explained Tai.

This was a novel thought which triggered a lot of questions in their heads. "What does it mean to have self-respect? Will that make us arrogant?" "And if someone insults us what should be our priority - respecting that person or self-respect?" There were loads of such questions that started coming forth. "Self-respect means not harbouring a sense of inferiority about oneself, accepting oneself, being aware of one's rights and needs!" If someone insults us instead of keeping silent about our anger we must let the person know that we are not happy with his behaviour. While saying this, if we are angry then we may end up insulting the person. It is therefore important to tell the person very calmly not to repeat the same behaviour and thus, keep our self-respect intact", explained Tai.

This interesting discussion helped reveal the nuances of the word 'respect' as well as the difference between respect and fear. Moreover, it unfolded one of the important values in life for the children.

After discussing some such words ask the children to choose a new word. Creating pictorial representation of these words is an immensely enriching experience. The picture depicts the word and also its meaning. During the discussion the children start getting the meaning of the word and later, making a pictorial representation of the word allows them to assimilate its meaning. This

relationship that they now have with words helps them in the ‘process of understanding meanings’ throughout their life. Once they understand this process words that previously seemed distant now feel familiar and close. The use of this tool is recommended in Khelghar in order to enable the children to understand the abstract form of a language better and to develop their range of thoughts and emotions.

8) Newspapers

Newspapers bring us news from all around the world. They not only add to children’s knowledge but also help build an understanding about their immediate surroundings, the society and the world at large. You can effectively use newspapers to help the children to connect with the society, to think independently and not be influenced by the opinions propagated by newsmakers. There are many other ways in which you can use newspapers in the teaching-learning process.

Introducing newspapers to children

There are several reasons why children don’t like reading newspapers. They often don’t buy newspapers at home. Hence they are not familiar with newspapers. So sit down in a circle with them and together observe each and every page of the newspaper right from the heading of the page to the news heading, the style of reporting, the language used, the types of news printed on each page, the kind of information given, advertisements, colours, photographs, the font used etc. Discuss these observations with them. By doing so, they will start familiarising themselves with newspapers. The language used in newspapers is ‘standard language’. It is very

different from the spoken language. Children often find it hard to understand. Those who are not in the habit of reading newspapers find it difficult to grasp the context when suddenly one day they pick up a newspaper to read. Therefore, once newspapers are introduced to the children Tai should make it a point to read out aloud certain news items to the children for a minimum of 10 to 15 minutes every day and to explain their context. This will ensure that the children are curious to know more about what they have read.

Working with news items

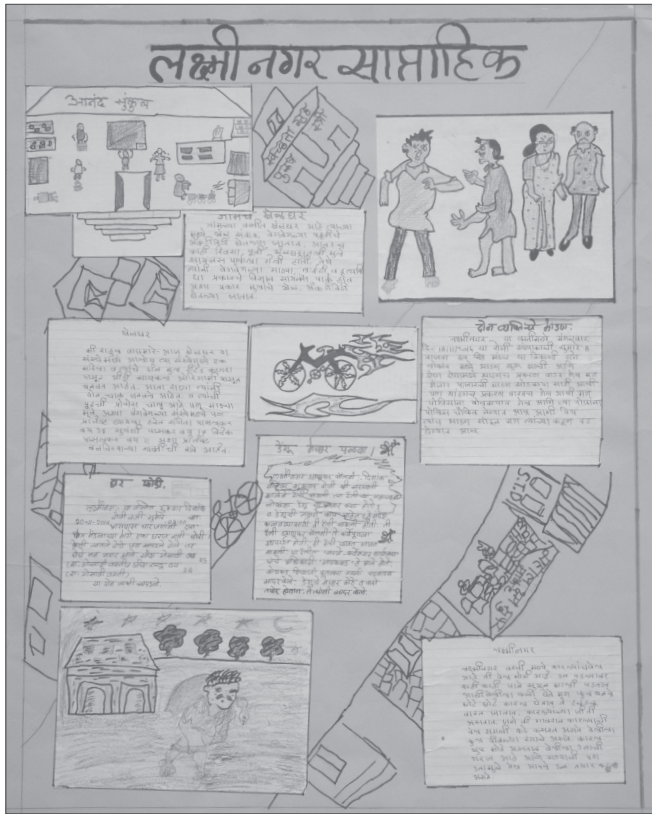
This activity aims at inculcating an interest in reading newspapers among children studying in the third grade and above. Ask them to choose a news item from the newspaper. Each child has to make a clipping of the said news item and either explain it or read it aloud. Talk about why he chose that particular item. This gives us a fair idea about the child’s inclination and his level of understanding.

Today’s news

A lot of things are happening around children. They like to create news out of these things. To begin with, Tai can write a small news item about something related to the immediate surroundings of the children and display it on the board. Get the children to talk about its content, heading etc. After a few days ask the children to write news items related to their surroundings and to bring them to the class. You can ask them to create news items on topics that are related to their school, their surroundings or their emotional space. You can then try to bring in diverse writing styles such as humoristic, conversational, pictorial etc.

The next step of this activity can be to create weekly posters in groups. Divide the children into groups and give each of the groups a topic. Ask them to write all the information and news about that topic on a card sheet. Discuss with them and decide what the poster should include: news, advertisements, interviews, jokes, informative articles, cartoons etc. Such posters can also be made about incidents occurring in Khelghar or in their basti. Children studying in the fourth grade and above can do this really well.





Newsletters made by seventh graders

Creating newspapers

This activity can be carried out with fourth and fifth graders. Ask the children to select and cut out different news items from different newspapers. They have to now create a newspaper out of those clippings. Ask them to choose a name for their newspaper. Tell them to first discuss together and decide which clipping goes where and why and then ask them to arrange and paste the clippings neatly to create their newspaper.

This helps promote certain skills. They learn how to select news items, decide their layout, neatly paste them in the designated spaces and re-organise if and when required.

Registering one's opinion about a news item

This activity can be organised once the children get into the habit of reading news. Let the children choose a news item from the newspaper. Ask them to paste its clipping into a notebook. They should then write down below the clipping what they understood after reading the news item, what they agreed with and disagreed with, their opinion about it etc. Becoming familiar with newspapers, being interested in reading them, making reading a habit etc. are all part of this journey.

9) Interview

'Interviewing' someone is basically chit chatting with that person, asking him/her questions and casually obtaining information from him/her. It is a crucial life skill. 'Interviewing' skills are a must-have when one wishes to obtain information about a particular person, organisation or work.

One must know which questions to ask so as to obtain the information that one is seeking. Often in school children have to answer questions but they rarely ask them. It is therefore important to encourage the children to ask questions freely at Khelghar. They are to be taught how to ask questions. Practice the use of interrogative words such as when, who, where, why etc. with them.

The person from whom we are seeking information must feel like talking to us. Prepare a list of questions intended for the interview along with the children. Discuss with the children 'How should one behave if one wants a particular person to share information with us?' If information sharing has to happen one must have some background knowledge about the person and his/her work beforehand. With this prior knowledge one can connect more easily with the interviewee. It is important to fix a time convenient to the interviewee.

You must also carry a pen and a notebook to write down the information shared during the interview. And if two children are conducting the interview one of them can take notes while the other is asking questions.

It is desirable that the children include interviews of people related to their projects at Khelghar. For example, interviewing vegetable vendors for the project on the 'Marketplace' or the traffic police for the project on



'Traffic' etc. In this way, talking to strangers helps them overcome their inhibitions. This trains them to speak respectfully and with proper understanding.

In the next phase of this activity the children have to analyse the information gathered in the interview and present it to everybody. This exercise helps to develop a number of skills in children such as analysis of the information at hand, elimination of superfluous elements, grouping of all important points in a coherent manner etc.

Interviewing a person in the presence of an audience is an advanced skill. The special programs carried out at Khelghar should create such an opportunity for the children. Tai must accompany them not only in the preparation of such presentations but also in the discussion that follows later. Her focus should be on pointing out areas where there is scope for improvement without criticising the child.

10) Role play

Children constantly observe things and people surrounding them. These observations trigger diverse emotions in their mind and they begin to think. This process helps shape their opinions/perceptions and this is how the concept of values is developed. However, these thoughts remain unexpressed. In order to help them to express their thoughts one can combine language with acting. Role play helps one to imagine oneself in a specific situation and as a different character. 'Role play' as a tool can be used often as a part of the teaching-learning process. When learning English as a second language children feel that they have understood a story they have read. But they haven't really understood it completely. Here's an occasion to get the children to enact (improvise) a play based on that story in their mother tongue. While doing this activity, children automatically connect the content of the story to their world of emotions and perform spontaneously. The story line seeps into their minds unknowingly.

In fact, role play can also be effectively used to explain geographical, historical and scientific concepts, e.g. the invention of agriculture, rotation-revolution of planets etc.

The most important use of role play is as a problem-solving technique. For example,

- How is our home environment and how should it be?

- How do our school teachers behave with us and how should they behave with us; similarly, how do we and should we behave with them?

Thus it helps in improving relationships, resolving differences and initiating a dialogue between any two persons, be it sister and brother, mother and child, father and child, mother and father etc.

Limited time is allotted for the preparation of a role play. So presentations are often spontaneous and end up bringing forth even the negative perspectives that the children have in their daily lives. When they sit down to discuss after the presentations are over they laugh at themselves. They realise their mistakes without being told. They also accept their mistakes though they may not do so otherwise.

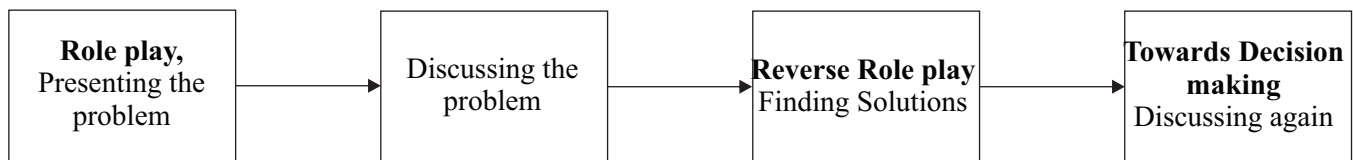
So in the second part when they are supposed to present how this relationship should be they come up with effective solutions. Unconsciously their minds start thinking about the greater good.

When we use a role play for problem solving the presentation is done in two parts.

- 1) Presenting the problem
- 2) Presenting the possible solutions



A play presented by the children on the subject of Gender Equality



Let's call the first part a role play and the second part a reverse role play. It is vital to have a group discussion after the presentation of both the parts. It helps children understand the various aspects of the problem. They can then evaluate all possible solutions to it.

Through a role play

- Children get the chance to express their emotions.
- They can think from another person's perspective.
- They experience positive thinking.
- Concepts like good-bad, just-unjust can be discussed.
- Children realise the inconsistencies between their thoughts and their behaviour.
- They acquire a deeper understanding of an incident, why it happened and its consequences when they see things unfold in front of their eyes in the form of a play.
- They come up with a variety of solutions.

A discussion then ensues to find answers to the question and this makes it easier to choose a solution.

Let's now have a closer look at how this tool works with the help of an example at Khelghar. Tai should prepare a short note (given below) on the problem that she plans to

present before the children for discussion. She should then read it out to them.

“Sameer is a 12 year old boy studying in 6th grade. His financial condition is miserable. His parents are not educated. They do hard physical labour to earn a living. Sameer lives in a slum. As in all other slums there are many issues such as filth, lack of hygienic conditions, fights, addictions etc. Sameer's parents want him to grow up with a good education and get himself a good job. But Sameer is always lost in his own world. He has no addiction but he loves to roam around with his friends. His friends do not attend school and those who do are very moody. They go to school only when they feel like it. On some days Sameer goes to school on other days he gives it a miss. Sameer's parents are under the impression that he goes to school and studies regularly. They take care of all his needs. But the truth cannot be hidden for long. One day his parents learn that he does not attend school regularly. His father beats him black and blue. He cannot focus at school. Tai tried to speak to him on several occasions about going to school. He agrees but does not feel like attending school.”

After having read out such an incident to the children give them 10 minutes to prepare the role play. While presenting the play the children may also add in their experience. After the presentation initiate a discussion on the play. Ask them the question, ‘In such a situation what should have Tai at Khelghar, Sameer's friends and his parents done?’ Get them to discuss and present their thoughts through a ‘Reverse Role play’. The discussion that follows should seek answers to questions like ‘Is this possible? If not, then what should one do? etc.

The topics given for role play should relate to the questions that each age group faces.

Children often do not consciously think about issues such as disputes between children and adults, girls quitting school and marrying at an early age, boys bunking school etc. When questions come up for discussion in this manner it provides an opportunity to Tai to get to the root of the problem and for the children to thoroughly examine all the aspects of the problem.

Skits

This is a very short performance!

For example, once during a workshop on sex education for teenagers two Tais had presented a skit where they were in the roles of a teenage girl and a boy respectively. Using only facial expressions they had enacted ‘What must be going through the minds of the girl and the boy while walking on the street and later when sharing a bus seat.’

The children watching the skit understood so many things without having to speak about them. Their embarrassment and hesitation disappeared. This little skit was useful in initiating a discussion with them about mental and physical changes that take place at this age.

The facilitator's role in a role play

Role play is a tool to get to the root cause of an issue! In order to reach the core of the problem and make an informed decision it is necessary to discuss and examine all the aspects of the problem along with the contents of the role play.

- The facilitator should be well-versed with the scope of the topic for the role play, its purpose, the capabilities of the participants and their needs.
- The facilitator needs to arouse the children's curiosity and create a mind-set to watch the role play before the actual presentation. At the beginning the facilitator should introduce the topic just enough to get the children interested in it. The facilitator should be skilled at presenting the topic in precise and concise words and should in fact be able to raise questions.
- The facilitator should be interested in acting. This will ensure that the interaction with the children is more effective. Besides, this will help the facilitator to get an idea of how the play will

impact the audience and to suggest the necessary changes.

The facilitator should possess good observational skills. He/she should observe the children while the play is being presented. He/she should be capable of processing how the children respond to different situations: are there any doubts in their minds, who is sitting quietly, who is talking a lot and why etc.

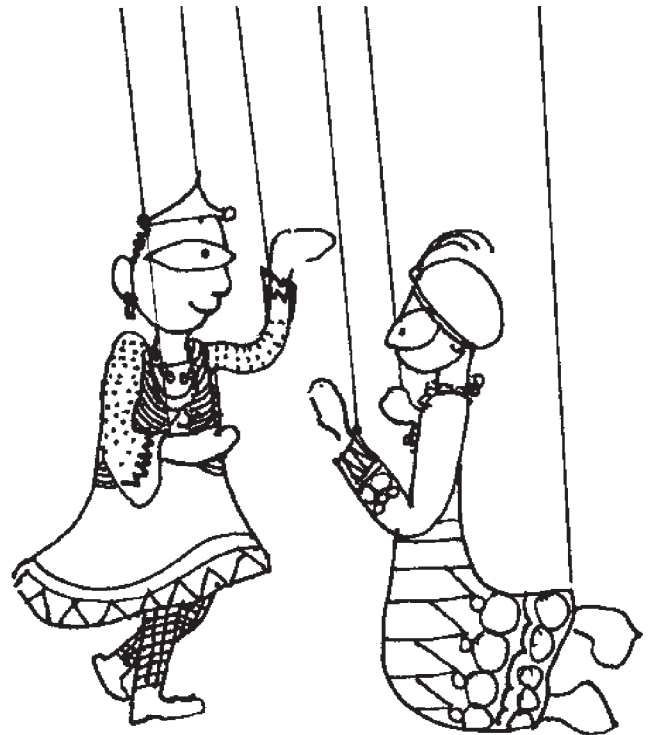
- The facilitator must be skilled at communicating. The discussion that follows the presentation is also crucial. It should answer everybody's questions and give each person the chance to speak. If there are points that the children have missed the facilitator should be skilled enough to ask them questions in a manner that will bring the expected points to the fore instead of directly revealing them to the children. It is also his/her responsibility to ensure that the discussion does not drift away from the main topic.

11) Puppet Show

This tool can be used to encourage children to discuss an issue, to understand a concept in their curriculum or to simply have some fun.

The puppets being used in the show should be attractive and their conversation interesting. A puppet show is performed from behind the curtains. Children cannot see the person pulling the strings of the puppets. The fact that the puppets resemble the characters that they play, that they imitate their lively movements and dialogues is what makes a puppet show so powerful.

The objective of the puppet show must be clear before you write its script. As far as possible try choosing characters that the children love and can identify with. For example, children love to see animals, birds, naughty children, children who can speak without any fear etc. At the same time you must not get carried away by the idea of making it lively and must ensure that the characters do not use foul or indecent language. If you wish to teach children a certain concept from their curriculum or want them to have a discussion about a certain issue it becomes important to create a context before they watch the



show and to have a proper discussion about the topic after watching the show.

This tool has a lot of scope for creativity. You can work with different types of puppets, those that can move their hands and feet; you can use so many different things for the backdrop too like different types of pictures or posters etc. The best part of doing a puppet show is that the choice of the subject, voice modulation in dialogue delivery, construction and organisation of scenes, all contribute to our development and that of the children.

Let's look at the following example in detail. Once at Khelghar we had to organise a fifteen-day Maths workshop for fifth and sixth graders. The children were not particularly enthused by this idea. Basically, they feared maths. They were certain that they were not going to like it. Initially, it was necessary to work on their dislike and fear for the subject and instil in them the confidence that maths can be easier to understand through activity based learning. We thus performed a puppet show on this topic. Chingi and Pintya took the stage, calling each other. After greeting the audience they spoke about why the children were gathered there. After some pranks and a little mock -fight they introduced the main topic. We would like to propose the following conversation as an example:

Pintya : Chingi, my stomach is hurting. I'm going home.

Chingi : Pintya, how come your stomach starts hurting the moment I say Maths? Stop acting. Tell me, are you scared of maths?

Pintya : I just don't understand what is expected. So when I solve sums I get all my answers wrong. Then I feel like avoiding maths... like running away from it.

Chingi : Oh! I see. Alright, tell me what did you buy from the shop yesterday?

Pintya : What? I bought half a kilo of potatoes, 250 gms of okra and four lemons. Why do you ask?

Chingi : What was the price of a kilo of potatoes?

Pintya : Twenty rupees a kilo - so ten for half a kilo, ten for the okra and five for the lemons. The total came to thirty.

Chingi : You dumbo, calculate properly - did you really pay thirty rupees?

Pintya : Ah! You got me! I ate a chocolate worth 5 rupees. But why are you asking all this?

Chingi : Listen, maths doesn't exist only in books. It is also a part of our everyday life. For example, watches, calendars and cards that we love to play, all have to do with maths.

Pintya : Oh yes, you're right! I had never thought on these lines before. Will they teach maths like this at Khelghar through games and activities?

Then I'm willing to come with you, let's go!

Since this play and the dialogues showcased their world of emotions, they found the play very engrossing. Moreover, the acting and movements of the puppets created never ending ripples of laughter amongst them. Naturally therefore, they took part in the next session wholeheartedly.

12) What will I do then?

In our day to day life we make decisions about one thing or the other. It doesn't really matter that some of these decisions are made easily and spontaneously. However, for certain decisions we have to consider all aspects of the problem. When decisions are made consciously and are based on positive thinking they are more likely to be executed. This potential can be developed in children with the help of the following tool.

Present a problem to the children and ask them, 'If this happens what will you do?' Encourage them to think on these lines. A heated discussion generally ensues among the children on the possible solutions. For example, you can ask the primary group, 'what will you do if the milk boils over while heating it?' The children may suggest solutions such as, "I will inform my mother", "I will try



to blow on it gently", "I will turn off the knob", "I will polish off the spilt cream", "I will wipe and clean the spilt over milk", "I will stand watchful near the stove while boiling milk the next time". Discuss each of the options and then help the children choose the option that makes the most sense.

You can increase the complexity of the question, 'Then what will I do?' based on the children's age group. For example, 'what if I get lost in a fair...' 'What if my mother

What will I do then?

Given below are the stages of what can be done when faced with a difficult situation:

1. Understanding the problem

- What exactly has happened?
- Who all are involved in it?
- What exactly was the situation at that time?

2. Why did it happen?

Finding out the reasons for each of the aspects of the problem.

3. Analysing what went wrong, whose fault it was and to what extent.

4. Finding a solution by examining different aspects of the problem.

(a) Immediate efforts

- accepting one's mistake
- having the desire to correct it
- examining if one has the ability to correct it
- examining how it can be corrected
- suggesting ways to correct it, helping out, determining the steps to be taken.
- ensuring that things are moving as decided.

(b) Long-term efforts

- What changes does one need to bring about in oneself, one's opinions and methods?
- What should be done in order to change the situation?

falls ill and there is no one to look after her at home...'
'What if guests suddenly turn up at home when my mother is not around and I have to leave for my class...'
'What if the door is locked when I return home from school...'
'What if my father is not ready to give me money for the trip...'
'What if there's a fight between my parents...'
'What if the couple next door gets into a fight and the husband beats up his wife...'
Initiate a discussion on the solutions suggested by the children.

You can expand the scope of these subjects for high school and youth groups. You can propose disciplinary

issues such as 'What should Tai do if the children are making too much noise in their class?' or other issues that they might have experienced and are close to their heart, such as 'I like a girl in my class', 'A boy said I love you to me', 'I was teased by boys hanging out in the street', 'My friends forced me to have a smoke/to drink alcohol'. What is important is the discussion that follows about such issues. Through discussion Tai learns how the children find solutions to their problems. This can be a starting point for discussions on a number of topics like interpersonal relationships, our responsibilities as members of the society, our social commitments etc.

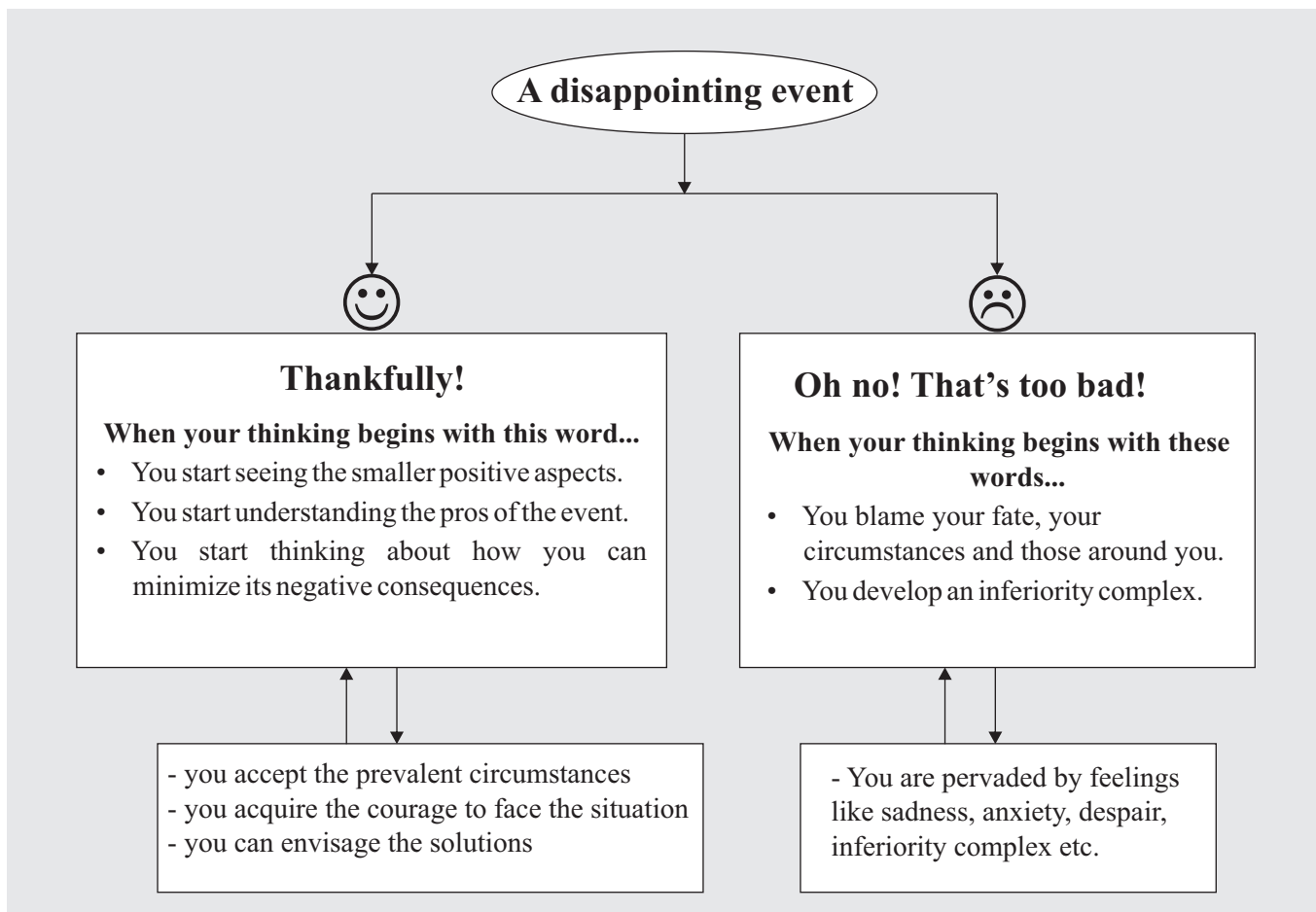
This tool is very useful for motivating children to think. Children often witness the rash behaviour of adults, their confusion while facing issues and their anger that sometimes worsens the situation. And often, they themselves behave like adults. Through this activity children would realise how decisions made after weighing all pros and cons prove to be beneficial from all angles.

When we are actually faced with a problem our mind becomes restless and agitated. However, during this activity one is only 'imagining' the problem and hence one can think calmly. The ensuing discussion can also offer options that lead us in the right direction. Though this does not guarantee that the children will start acting similarly in real life it does prepare them to think before they act.

13) Thankfully!

When you think with the help of the technique 'thankfully...', your attention is drawn to the positives even in a problematic situation and this helps you think positively. In a difficult situation feelings of sadness, disappointment and fear engulf our mind. If our thoughts change our feelings also would change and it becomes possible to think in a positive manner.





While using this tool with the children first lay out a difficult or a problematic situation and then ask them to suggest options that begin with 'thankfully...'. Discuss with them how they can overcome their negative feelings in difficult situations and turn them into positive thoughts.

Let's have a look at the example where the mother has to go out of town just before the final exam. Such a situation is nobody's fault. The circumstances are such that all the hard work done during the year can go down the drain. This leads to self-pity. The children's faith in hard work dwindles. 'My luck is rotten! Now how will I study?' Such thoughts start building up in their mind. At such times ask them to start a sentence with 'thankfully,' and tell them to complete it. This will encourage them to think positively and they may come up with the following statements -

"Thankfully, both my parents did not go."
"Thankfully, my father has stayed back and can cook basic meals so at least we won't go hungry."
"Thankfully, my mother has prepared some snacks for me."

"Even if I am stressed I am trying to console myself and not feel demoralised."
"I now realise the importance of the role that my mother plays in my life."
This makes the children realise that if they think positively they will see the silver lining to the dark clouds and that it all depends on their attitude and approach. If they learn to look at events in a positive way it will give them the strength required to face the situation. For them to stand up to the challenge, get them to ask the question, "What can be the worst thing to happen?" This approach throws up the following options in the above-mentioned situations: "I might score less."
"I might fail in a certain subject."
"My class rank might go down."

This way of thinking helps you imagine the probabilities in future and accept the current circumstances. The mind overcomes the storm of emotions and begins to seek solutions instead, such as - there is no need to be worried, let me now think about how I can salvage the situation, let me use whatever time I have on hand wisely. "Instead of blaming things on fate, accepting the challenge that the

How I look at myself depends on my thoughts and thoughts can be changed. Negative thoughts give rise to negative emotions. When I change those thoughts, the emotions would change as well.

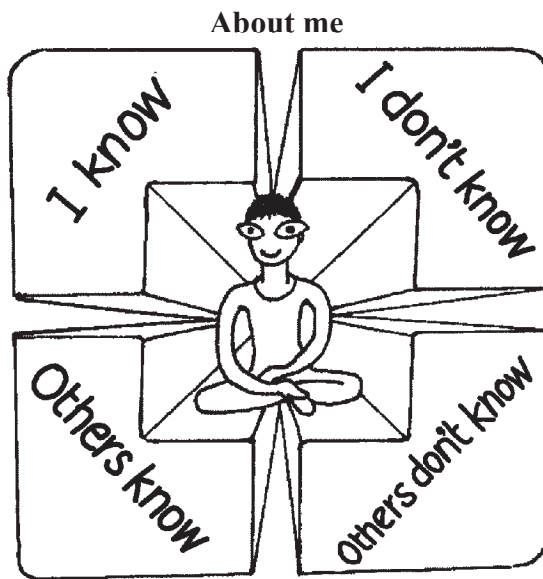
Louise Hay

situation demands and finding the best possible solution will increase my strength." Positive thinking helps guide our efforts in the right direction. After this stage, you can ask the children to think of a difficult situation that they have faced before and to come up with a list of solutions on it, starting each point with 'thankfully'.

14) The Four Quadrants

- What kind of a person am I?

This tool can be used with children above ten years of age. It is very useful for thinking about a subject from different angles and making decisions about the way forward in that particular context.



- This tool is inspired by the well-known management concept of SWOT analysis. S - Strengths, W - Weaknesses, O - Opportunities, T - Threats. Decision-making becomes easier when you base your thinking on these four axes.

This tool can be used to evaluate one's own understanding as well as that of the others.

Likewise, it can also be used to make a decision in the context of a task, a project or an issue. At Khelghar when children are trying to explore themselves it can help them understand their own weaknesses and the resultant potential threats while helping them determine their growth path based on this analysis.

- The following four points can be presented to help them understand themselves.

Ask the children to make four sections on a piece of paper and to fill in information about themselves in the four quadrants.

What do I like?	What all can I do?
What am I not capable of doing?	What is it that I want to learn?

Since we wish to take the children towards growth and positive changes, in the final quadrant give them options that will automatically make them think in the desired direction.

- The following four points can be considered while making a decision or before starting a new project.

The things that I like about this activity	The things that I dislike about this activity
The things that I fear about this activity	The opportunities/benefits that this activity presents

For example, ‘Should I take admission in the science stream or not?’ ‘Should I participate or not in the play?’ In order to make the decision-making easier it is important to think in the manner described above. Writing down your thoughts based on the above points helps cover all possible aspects and thus makes decision making easier.

- You can use the tool mentioned below to prioritise your tasks and objectives.

(Refer to the table given below)

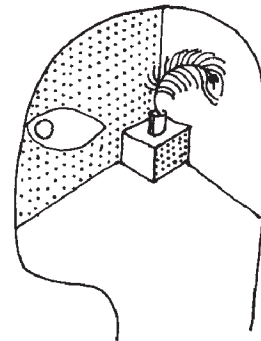
We often give priority to tasks that need to be accomplished urgently. This results in putting important tasks on the back burner. E.g. Action oriented tasks take priority over studies. We have to take time out for such tasks. If we divide our tasks as follows then we get a clear understanding of what takes up our time and can better organise our day. Moreover, we can organise our tasks more realistically thus increasing the chances of actually executing them. For example, if we want to take time out for activities such as reading, studying, exercising, eating healthy food,, then we realise that we will have to curb

the time spent watching TV, making unnecessary phone calls and sending text messages.

This tool can be used in various contexts such as for creating a schedule during the children’s exams, organising projects or festivals and ceremonies etc.

15) Cinema: an entertaining and powerful tool

Whether a person is feeling dejected, angry or is lost in thought, good cinema has the potential to divert attention and completely immerse him/her in the subject. That is the power of the audio-visual media. Let’s check out an example.



‘Black hole’ is a short 2-minute film! It is about a man who decides to stay back in office for work and while working suddenly discovers a ‘black hole’. When he slides his hand through it he feels no obstruction, neither the door, the wall nor the locker. This discovery triggers the man’s greed which in turn gets him trapped in a sticky situation.’ All this happens in the span of just two minutes and the spectator is left stunned.

	Important tasks →	
Urgent tasks ↓	1) Important and urgent tasks. E.g. Homework for tomorrow	2) Important but not urgent tasks. E.g. Studying for exam that is 3 months away.
	3) Tasks that are urgent but not important. E.g. Putting covers on textbooks and notebooks.	4) Tasks that are neither important nor urgent. E.g. Going for a movie with friends.

How to work with mainstream cinema?

Children love popular mainstream films. They feel like watching these films in Khelghar as well.

Such films sell not just the storyline but also a certain lifestyle, relationships, perspectives etc. In other words, they show us how to live, how to be, how to express oneself, how to influence others very effectively. The entire society, especially the youth, is easily fascinated by this. It is therefore important to teach children film appreciation from a very young age. For this, Tai should watch films popular with children very seriously. She should think about what the children may like about it and what all may influence them. She should then watch the film again with the children and have a discussion about the good and the bad, the realistic and unrealistic aspects etc. Let's take the example of the film '3 Idiots' that became very popular. Despite its popularity, things such as taking

admission in a prestigious college under someone else's name, forcing a plane to land etc. are actually illegal. It must be discussed with the children if this is right. Similarly, after watching the children's favourite film, Dabang, there should be a discussion around 'how the police themselves break rules, justify doing so and whether it is right'. It is of course implied that Tai should ask questions and give the children the opportunity to answer after careful thinking. She should disclose her opinion later. This discussion makes them think instead of blindly imitating the film's characters. When children get to watch good films and begin to appreciate them in Khelghar, the impact of masala films diminishes automatically and they start noticing their flaws and trickery. Besides, it helps improve their understanding of this medium and especially of good films.

Needless to say that the discussion that follows is a fruitful one. Children start introspecting. They start connecting this to their own life and talk. Unknowingly, they seem to have understood something quite important.

Cinema can be used as a tool in various ways while working with children.

1. To talk about a subject in depth, to stir one's emotions
2. To learn to question the social, economic and political realities around us so that one may think in the right direction and find answers.
3. To create awareness about a sensitive topic and have a discussion around it.
4. To understand a certain concept, method or structure.

Let's look at this example. 'Dekh Lo' (Watch it) is a very impressive short film available on the Internet! A thought-provoking film about eve teasing!

Today, the Internet is a treasure trove of such short films. But your choice of films is important. We all know that films that promote negativity, violence, discrimination,

obscenity and market upper class lifestyles should be avoided. There is no dearth of films that convey messages effectively and beautifully. But you must be careful to ensure that such films do not inadvertently show incorrect things like superstition, religious propaganda, gender inequalities etc.

Using cinema as a tool

Watching a film and discussing it later is a lengthy process. So speak to the children about the film before showing it in order to ensure that they participate in the process wholeheartedly. Tai should have seen the film beforehand. She should talk to the children about why she liked the film and why she felt that the children must see it. She should however refrain from telling them the story. A film is a creation of art and as such, each spectator tries to make sense of it according to his/her own nature and experience. Tai should let the children experience this for themselves and not influence their thoughts in advance.

While watching a film the children or even Tai may be excited to share some of their experiences but that may interrupt the flow and spoil the effect of the film. It is therefore better to instruct the children beforehand not to talk while everybody is watching. In case of a foreign language film or a film with a complex storyline you may explain to them the background and story of the film either before you begin to watch it or during the interval. This ensures that the children understand the film.

Everybody is used to getting up and walking straight out of the Cinema Hall after the film is over. You have to therefore insist that the children wait back and read the credits that are displayed at the end. It is a way to show your respect towards the tremendous efforts put in by all the technicians. A discussion about the film must follow.

A well-made audio-visual document can captivate the spectator's mind. It may not therefore be possible for the children to react right away. It is however necessary to have a discussion about it. You can therefore give them 10 minutes and then start the discussion.

The mood created by the ending can become the starting

point for this discussion. What happened at the end? What did you like? What must have been the objective in the minds of the writer and the director while making the film? Tai can put forth such questions. Tai should keep her questions ready for the children to discuss later.

Of course, the discussion should also give children the space to express their thoughts and viewpoints. This helps build an understanding about the subject of the film. Gradually they start thinking concretely and clearly. It helps them to rethink on their biases in order to build a positive outlook.

We hope that all the above tools will help you to work with children in creative ways and to motivate them to think. Our experience says that these tools are very useful in getting children to think consciously, to express themselves beautifully and to have enriching conversations. The capabilities, attitude and knowledge of the person using the tool will also determine their efficacy. As these capabilities improve, so does the scope of the tool.



Discussing the world map



Dear Deepa,

Wish you the best and hope you enjoy your new school!

You've graduated from the seventh to the eighth grade now. Despite not having friends in the new school you decided to go ahead and seek admission. You tried hard to get it. This requires a lot of courage. It is clear that you have accepted the challenge of exploring and making new friends. Nowadays at Khelghar, when I see your willingness to learn English, your enthusiasm, your desire to help others in need, I am overwhelmed. Keep up this persistence.

These days, your mother does not keep well. You have also realised that your sister finds it difficult to manage things at home due to her job and you have, on your own, started helping her out at home. I met your mother the other day. She was saying, 'My daughter has become very understanding. She manages her studies and helps out at home too. It is only because of you that she has changed so much! It really feels so nice.' You must be very happy reading about your mother's compliment, right? Your mother, who used to be constantly upset with you, is now all praises for you. I'll be honest with you Deepa – apart from expecting you to do housework your mother also wanted you to remain calm and talk to her lovingly. Today you have fulfilled that expectation by opening a dialogue with her.

During the journey of your life, it is you who has to take well thought out decisions. You must not get trapped in unwanted temptations; you must keep your anger and emotions under control. Besides, you must refuse to be treated unjustly and ensure the same for others as well.

This is what will bring joy in your life and that of the others around you. You will derive a positive energy from this.

Wish you the best for the journey ahead!

With love,
Jyoti Tai

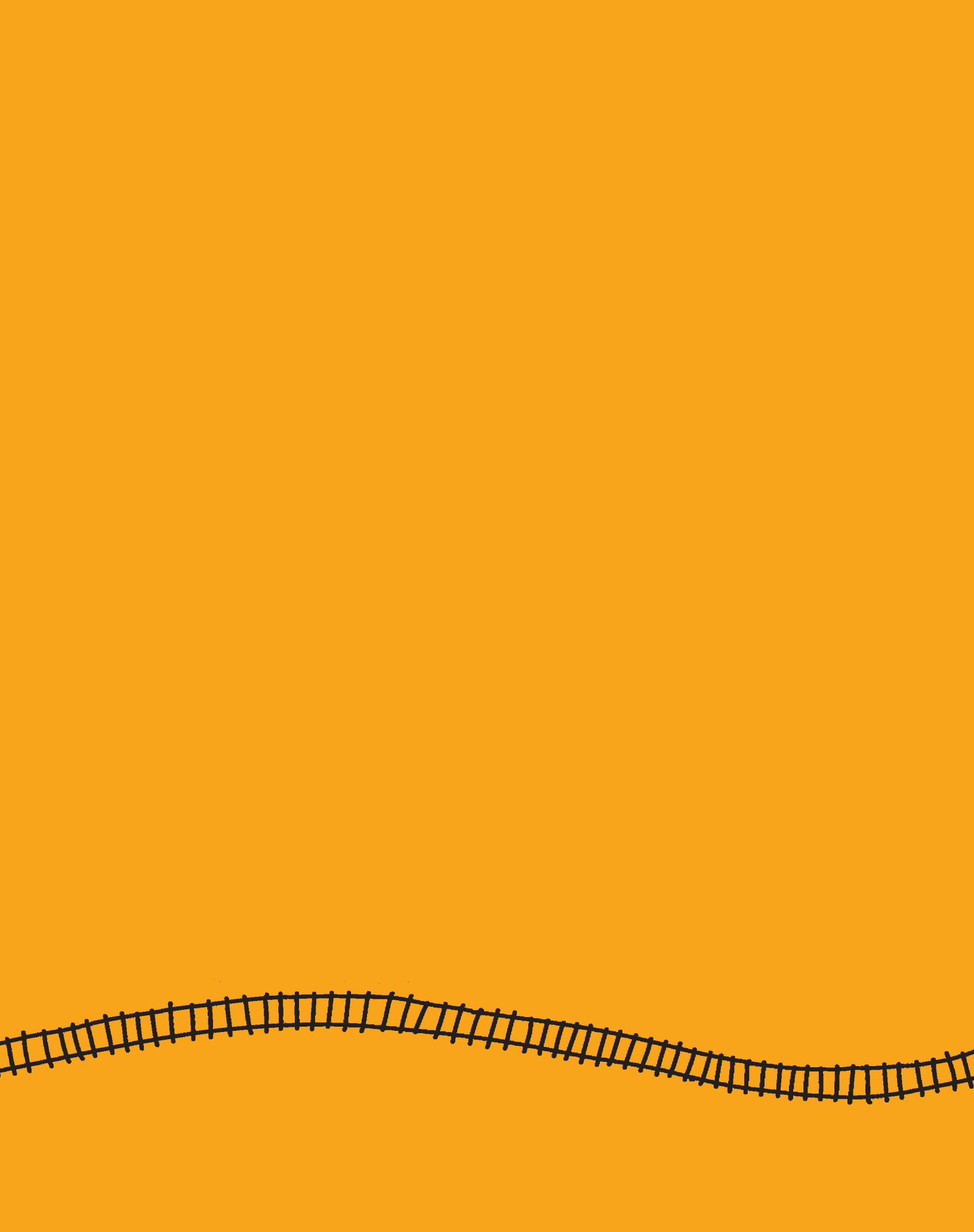
Dear Jyoti Tai,

It has been a while since I decided that I would not fall in love with a boy so soon. That I would first finish my studies, stand on my feet, make a place for myself in society through my thoughts, my behaviour and only then, think about love. Jyoti Tai, you have expressed such nice things about me. I will try to bring about changes in myself about all that you've told me. I will also fulfil your expectations. Being aware of how you feel, I promise that I will help other girls to grow along with me.

I am trying to understand my mother. I share everything that happens at school and at Khelghar with my mother in an effort to build a friendly relationship with her. I try to bring joy in her life. But Tai, she is not used to this kind of my behaviour. She feels that I am teasing her, making fun of her to vex her. I plan to talk to her about this. I'm thinking of what I can do to make her happy.

Nowadays, I feel that nobody understands me at home. I speak kindly to everybody, I make adjustments but why does nobody try to understand me?

- Yours truly,
Deepa







Children understand the joy of learning, they want to learn; they are curious and want to explore the world around them. They relate new information to their own experiences and express spontaneously what they have grasped and felt. They enrich themselves and the surroundings through what they have comprehended.

How beautiful is this picture of the teaching-learning process! But far from reality! This book tries to explain how to bridge this gap; especially, how to help those who are excluded from the mainstream education.

It is based on years of work done by Palakneeti Pariwar's Khelghar project and will definitely be useful to every person sensitive about the process of learning and teaching.