INCLUSION OF SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT IN EDUCATION: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF A DIGANTAR SCHOOL

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the award of the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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2009

29 July, 2009

DECLARATION

I, Shivani Nag, declare that the dissertation entitled **"Inclusion of Socio-Cultural Context in Education: An Ethnography of a Digantar School,"** submitted by me for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my bonafide work. I further declare that the dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.
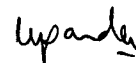
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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Acknowledgement

First and foremost I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Minati Panda for being my guide and my mentor. Her support has been more than academic. I am grateful to her for introducing me to Digantar. Her guidance, encouragement and faith have been great source of inspiration and motivation.

My understanding of inclusion would have remained narrow if it were not for the inter-disciplinary perspectives that I received in this centre. My sincere gratitude to the faculty of ZHCES for helping me broaden my intellectual horizon.

A number of people have made significant contributions in this research endeavour which I wish to acknowledge. The research endeavour would not have been possible without the support extended to me by Shri. Rohit Dhankar and Ms. Reena Das(founders, Digantar). I want to thank them for allowing me to do my research in Digantar, for ensuring that I had a safe and comfortable stay, for allowing me to use their library and for their valuable inputs in helping me understand the philosophy of Digantar.

I would like to express my gratitude to the teachers in Digantar- Mr. Abdul Gaffar, Mr. Hemant Sharma, Mr. Nauratmal Pareek, Mr. Praveen, Ms. Tarannum, Mr. Jitnedra and Ms. Kanchan, for helping me understand the pedagogic practices in Digantar, for accompanying me during my community visits and for putting up patiently with my unfailing presence during their class hours and never ending queries post class hours.

I am grateful to Monika for being a great friend. Her knowledge, experience, viewpoints, creative insights and our numerous talks and debates have been of immense value, during the course of research and writing term papers. I would like express my gratitude to Prachi Aggarwal, Ramya and Sanjay for providing me useful academic inputs and relevant research material. I would like to thank Prabhat for going through my work and for his words of encouragement.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my friends whose supportive presence during this one year has been meant a lot. Honey my roommate for her moral support and encouragement, my friend Ritika for setting me impossible deadlines and staying patient as I failed to meet any.

Together they made my room a warm and happy space. My heartfelt thanks to Kasturi Boragohain for her encouragement, warm and reassuring presence, Archana and Veena for their bubbling and contagious enthusiasm and Shweta for the endless cups of tea that kept me awake.

I am grateful to my family for their unflinching faith and support.

My fond gratitude to Dr. Honey Oberoi Vahali whose teachings and life are an eternal source of inspiration. I am thankful to her for introducing me to the world of research and teaching me the value of purposive research.

Last but definitely not the least, my heartfelt gratitude to all the children in Ratwali who with their warmth and smiles gave me numerous moments to cherish.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to understand the importance of including a child's socio-cultural context in education and explore the ways in which it could be done. Vygotskian .concepts of 'mediation, zone of proximal development, and everyday and scientific concepts provided the initial understanding of the role a child's socio-cultural context played in concept building. Bourdieu's theory on social and cultural reproduction provided a sociological understanding of the role of social and cultural capital the child brought to the classroom. The main objectives of the research were to see how inclusion of socio-cultural resources and experiences in the pedagogic practices facilitated concept building in students. The sensitivity of the school practices towards a child's emotional needs and social identity and the nature of school-community interactions were also studied.

The study was conducted in Ratwali branch of Digantar schools in Rajasthan which follows an 'Alternative Elementary Education Programme' based on an alternative philosophy and pedagogic understanding of education. The data gathered in form of classroom observations, perusal of Digantar reports and documents, interviews with teachers and parents and analysis of Digantar textbooks provided a detailed picture of how Digantar was able to use an 'inclusive education approach'

The data that emerged during the course of research showed that Digantar was able to make the socio-cultural context of the child relevant in classroom and school practices. The textbooks and the classroom activities drew extensively from the physical and socio-cultural context of the child in form resource materials, examples or content. Digantar's curriculum was found to be based on the premise that learning can be built on a child's experiences and already developed skills. Community participation and interaction was one of the key features of Digantar's philosophy and practice. Multi grade classrooms, emphasis on co-operative rather than competitive efforts among students, good teacher-student relationship and participatory classroom teaching made the teaching-learning process child friendly.

Chapter 1
Introduction

Chapter 1

Why Socio Cultural Context?

People are born neither free nor equal. They are born in contexts, which in so many ways are determined. For education to really benefit people across all divides, it is important that no one be kept outside its cover. There is a need to 'include all'. Millennium Development Goal of achieving universal elementary education or the recently passed 'Right to Education bill, both are a reflection of the 'essentiality' of education for the empowerment of an individual and the growth of the nation. However the phrase 'include all' also has a second and an equally important dimension. Does the school include the child in totality or does schooling require a socio-cultural or a psychological split in the child. The connection between the two interpretations lies in the fact that inclusion of the second kind may determine how successful the first is. A child who finds his/her context invisible in the class and his/her experiences and skills rejected, is likely to become disinterested in learning and consequently may choose to quit it. The current research endeavour is an attempt to study the inclusive practices in a school following alternative education philosophy with respect to the socio-cultural context of the child.

Part I: Introduction

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994)[1] called on governments to recognize diversity and "adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusion education". 'Towards inclusive practices in secondary education', a compilation of studies by International Working Group on Disability and Development (IWGDD) in collaboration with UNESCO (2003), traces the origin of the word 'inclusive education' to the belief that 'right to education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society'. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), asserted education to be basic human right, a right that was affirmed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United nations, 1989).

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[1] For the full text refer to THE SALAMANCA STATEMENT AND FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION ON SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION,,World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June 1994

Review of early literature on 'inclusive education' reveals that the concept has largely been used in reference to children with disabilities. Baxter and Fredrickson (2005)[2], in their paper, 'Every Child Matters: Can educational psychology contribute to radical reform', however do highlight the growing trend towards the use of a broader term 'additional needs or 'special needs' (which include marginal groups such as socio-economically disadvantaged) over 'special educational needs'. They emphasize that special attention be paid to any child whose 'difference' may lead to social exclusion.

Indian government policies and programs over past few decades have been aimed at 'inclusive education' whereby children coming from lower socio economic strata are allowed an entry into the educational system. The efforts are to make education 'accessible' in terms of reducing physical distance and also making it economically affordable. While absence of schools, lack of information among parents and the survival needs of the families whereby the parents are forced to have their children employed have been found to be significant reasons for the low rate of enrollment, it is also important to note that giving similar opportunities have not always yielded uniform results (Madan, 2007). Though programs such as DPEP, and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan have made a significant difference in the rate of enrollment, the dropout rates continue to remain high. Usha Jayachandran (2007) quoting the figures from NSS 52nd round of data, reports-

""Child not interested in studies" accounts for the highest proportion of dropouts in rural (37 per cent) and urban (37 per cent) areas and for both male and female children. "Parents not interested in studies" affect the female child more in rural (17 per cent) and urban (11 per cent) areas. Inability to cope with the demands of schooling has a somewhat equal effect on boys and girls in rural (11 per cent) and urban (13 per cent) areas and is one of the important reasons for dropping out. A larger proportion of female children in urban areas (5.6 per cent) drop out because of the need to work for wages or salaries to supplement the family income. Similarly, a higher proportion of male children vis-à-vis female children drop out to participate in other economic activities in rural (7.2 per cent) and urban (7.6 per cent) areas. A higher proportion of female children dropout to tend to domestic duties as compared to male children in rural (6.7 per cent) and urban (6.3 per cent) areas. And finally,

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[2] Baxter and Fredrickson (2005) in their paper 'Every child matters: can educational psychology contribute to radical reform?, Educational Psychology in Practice.

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financial constraints are seen to affect dropout relatively more in urban areas (16 per cent) as compared to rural areas (11.2 per cent)." (Jayachandran, 2007, pg 982).

The report shows that 'lack of interest' from the child is one of the major concerns. Jayachandran (2007) reasons that the results reflect a 'hostile' environment in the school. Lack of interest by children indicates that the problem is more than that of merely bringing the children to school. Physical entry to the educational system is just one dimension of inclusion.

For instance when a child is said to be brought under the fold of education system, what really is brought in? The equity in education moves much beyond physical access to education. Retention and leaning achievements are important dimensions of assessing quality of education. There are various other dimensions of inclusion which include social, cultural, psychological, without which the inclusion remains only partial. The policies of 'inclusion' often become limited in their success as their implementation fails to take cognizance of the difference in contexts and also the specific demands of certain communities vis-à-vis what they think they must 'also' learn. It is on this account that the directives to include children coming from lower economic background into the formal school set up, or creating for them 'informal' school settings, have encountered difficulties.

Inclusion of a child's 'life context' with all its dimensions which include socio-cultural, historical, economical and psychological besides just 'physical' inclusion is crucial if we wish to assess success of educational inclusion in terms more than just enrolment or retention rates. Exclusion of socio-context has effects on more than just enrolment and retention rates. The processes of selection to the school system and the demands it makes of students has impacts that are economic, sociological and cognitive. The three domains too are intricately linked and interdependent.

Our schools and institutes are part of the context that we live in. They cannot remain insulated from the socio-economic, political, and historical milieu that 'dynamically' exists. With different political regimes, the content of the text changes, histories are re-visited and re-interpreted. Changing economic scenarios affect the accessibility and quality of education. With neo

liberalism, principles of market in terms of demand and supply began to operate with respect to course and degree demands. To summarize, our life context thus finds its way into our schools. School cannot but reflect this context. What then becomes important to see is how the education system reflects, understands and transforms this context?

Barr (2006), while examining social norms related to caste which influence and access to primary education argues-

> "By defining poverty in terms of material possession, or deprivation of services, which is the predominant focus of public discourse on poverty, rather than in terms of social relationships (and the resulting exclusion which can come from these relationships), the resulting focus of social policy is on providing universal benefits or "reaching the poor" rather than ensuring the social inclusion of the excluded". (Barr, 2006; p2)

Part II : Invisible Contexts

"When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of a psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing".

This disequilibrium is a reality for a large population of India. Pushed to the margins for belonging to certain caste, religious, regional, linguistic, economic or gender groups, there are many who experience this 'forced' invisibility in the academic texts. Om Prakash Valimiki (2003) in his autobiographical account *'Joothan'* points out how a Dalit's context is rendered invisible in school curriculum. He recalls an incident from his school days where his class was being taught a lesson on 'Dronacharya[3]'). The teacher was talking about the difficulties he had to face at some point in life which created a very poignant moment for those listening. It was perhaps easier for those who came from relatively comfortable zones to understand this anguish. They could empathize with the anguish because the protagonist was closer to their real life experiences and their real experiences had different parameters of what was 'difficult'. For a

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[3] Dronacharya was a revered teacher in Mahabharta (a Hindu epic). He taught the art of war to princes' of the kingdom of. Haﬆi napur .

Dalit student, the experience of anguish was difficult to understand since what was described as 'difficult' was 'everyday' for them.

Another work on personal narratives that provide a commentary on decontextualised school practices is in form of a collection of letters a group of boys in a ... they wrote to their school teacher. The collection 'Letters to a Teacher'[4], 1967, present a series of narratives that reflect the academic setting in which the boys found themselves in. The letter begins by an acknowledgement of 'invisibility' that a 'certificate' centred decontextualised education system imposes on its students, *"You won't remember me or my name. You have failed so many of us"*. While the book may be located in a context that is different from India, certain voices may find a deep resonance with those here. An important pointer in the book is towards the fact that societies are inflexibly structured hierarchical and that to maintain the status quo, the quality of schools prepared for those at the lower rung, are poor from the beginning. The disconnect that the boys faced found expression in their statement, *"all your culture is built this way, as if you were the world"*.

Expressing their experience of 'invisibility' the students share another significant narrative where they mention a 'big professor' who once taught them and used words which they did not know or understand. He would talk of 'pedagogy', and other difficult words which the students found not just incomprehensible but to begin with also difficult to register. Their sense of personhood stood outside the class walls as the teacher failed to connect and include their individual presence. The students have expressed this saying, *"He was talking without looking at us. A university professor of education doesn't have to look at schoolboys. He knows them by heart, the way we know our multiplication table"* (p.8).

This failure of the school to see and understand then begins to seek legitimacy by locating the 'disinterest' among students. As mentioned earlier, lack of interest among students tends to get taken as a factor without context whereby the disinterest is seen as independent of what happens in the school. In this book, the students convey their awareness of this reasoning and also the

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[4] *"You Won't Remember Me: The schoolboys of Barbiana speak today. Letters to a teacher (Lettera a una professoressa)*,1967

underlying values the schools hold. *"You say that boys hate school and love play. You never asked us peasants... All your culture is built this way, as if you were all the world"* (p. 8).

Inclusion without voice is an experience that is global even as it undermines the local.

In **April 2004, there was a landmark Delhi High Court order** whereby the Delhi government directed its private schools to allot 20% seats for free to children of poor. While the step symbolized a move to include those at the margins, but a question that still stands is that if physical inclusion is sufficient to challenge the oppressive structures. I would want to share a professional experience to elucidate this point. Teaching in an 'elitist- English medium-private' school in Delhi where they did select some students from poor economic backgrounds, I was able to witness how the spirit of this directive failed to translate physical inclusion into a 'holistic inclusion'. In a specific incident, a child (son of bus driver employed by the school) was brought to the school counselling centre with complains that he was 'disrupting the class', was 'inattentive' and 'irregular with his class work and homework'. The teacher wanted an intelligence test conducted. The vague, partial and often selective operational definitions of 'intelligence' have generated many debates. There have been even greater number of debates on the 'context specific nature' of these tests which limits their generalization abilities and dependability. In first instance there was little effort to acknowledge his 'different' context; instead the first attempt was to question his 'abilities'. A confirmed lack of them would have offered a reason for his exclusion. However, once the test failed to identify his 'lack' of scholastic abilities, the rationale for exclusion was shifted from cognitive to socio-cultural. The reason for suggesting that he be enrolled in another school was that he did not 'speak the language' of others in the class', 'used slang that the teachers found unacceptable' and 'was unable to adjust to a surrounding which was in stark contrast to the one at his home. The change they claimed was for the benefit of the child.

Part III: Theoretical basis of importance of socio-cultural inclusion

The present research attempts to explore the processes of inclusion-exclusion in terms of how they are practiced in a classroom context and how they influence cognitive development of a child. Works of Pierre Bourdieu and Lev S. Vygotsky provide the theoretical foundation for planning the study.

Theory of social and cultural reproduction

A child is located in a context. The context provides the child with certain understandings and tools that are carried with him/her to the classroom setting. The classroom settings too make certain demands from the child. The suitability of the understandings and tools to the demands made plays an important role in how the further and deeper understandings of various academic concepts are shaped.

Are the inequalities redressed or are they further perpetuated? Pierre Bourdieu's 'social reproduction theory' provides a framework to understand and reflect on the power dynamics between the cultural, social and economic relations of a given period.

A child who enters a school setting, enters with an inherited cultural, social and economic capital that his familial context provides him with. One identified function of schools is to transmit 'values', or 'culture' that are inherited from the past. In an unequal society where the values and culture are differentially assigned and the two are placed on not just horizontal but also on a vertical axis, the process of transmission involves not just passing on accumulated values and culture but also the structures that define the hierarchical relationships between different values and cultures. It thereby enhances the existing structures rather than creating the space to question them or circumventing the oppressive ones. The socio-economic hierarchies are thereby reproduced rather than challenged.

The theory explains how 'retention' is not an independent choice the parents make and also that 'learning achievement' is not an indicator of child's merit. This understanding is important to appreciate how policies on inclusion must also address the socio-cultural differences that are reflected in rate of retention and learning achievement.

Our schools and institutes are part of the context that we live in. They cannot remain insulated from the socio-economic, political, and historical milieu that 'dynamically' exists. The concept of 'capital' is important in Bourdieu's theory.

> 'accumulated labour (in its materialised form or its incorporated, embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive basis by agents or groups of agents,

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enables them to appropriate social energy in the form or reified or living labour'. (Bourdieu, 1986; p. 241)

He further divides the capital into economic, cultural and social. 'The economic capital is that which is immediately and directly convertible into money. Social capital may be seen 'being made up of social obligations (social connections), which is convertible, in certain conditions into the economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility'. Cultural capital is further divided into three forms- embodied state, in the form of long lasting dispositions of the mind and the body; the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (such as books, instruments, and machines), which are the traces or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematic; and institutionalized state as in the form of educational qualifications'. (Bourdieu, 1986, p.242)

The very fact of the capital being 'accumulated' and on 'private, exclusive basis' implies that these are not uniformly distributed. This non-uniform distribution does not only provide differential access to the educational system but the structures that contribute to the non-uniform distribution are further reproduced and reinforced.

Human capital theorists who view education as an investment that would increase the efficiency and productivity of a person (viewed as 'human resource') by adding to his knowledge and information, tend to overlook that there is still another 'inheritance' that contributes to the 'learning tools' that an individual brings to a school setting. Bourdieu has written of societies as producing to reproduce. According to him, in order to do so and thereby regulating the inter-generational transmission of real and symbolic capitals, societies must have some structures that enable cultural reproduction. The relationship between education and structure of society cab be placed in this context where education may be seen as one of the modes in which society preserves and passes on the existing structures.

Failure to appreciate context in course of the formal learning process does not merely lead to a psychological disjunction between the academic and the 'real' but also leads to false and thereby 'dangerous' conclusions with respect to aptitudes and capabilities.

As with aptitude, merit too becomes a subject of misplaced assumptions. Krishna Kumar (1987) has debated the assumption that early schooling create a level playing field for the mass examinations that follow in later years. With special reference to civil services, he argues that selection starts much earlier when the child first enters school and that what we term as merit is a product of the early selections in the education system made on the basis of socio-cultural milieu.

In recent years, the debate on 'meritocracy' in India has assumed a great significance, sociological as well as political. The recent protests for and against the extension of the OBC caste in higher education has witnessed great upheaval. Writing on 'sociologising merit', Madan (2007) argues how the rewards and privileges of the 'upwardly mobile' are legitimatized using the 'merit' argument and also certain cultures hold an advantage over the rest owing to certain literary or other suitable traditions they might hold.

In reference to the Jews in America, Sowell (1981) discusses the Jews with a *"long history of reverent, Talmudic scholarship, tended to do much better than the Irish Americans with their cheery, lively oral tradition"*. While in this instance it is the result that socio-cultural capital determines, there are abundant examples in India itself where the 'selection into the educational system itself becomes a product of socio-cultural reproduction. The interview system of several schools is marked by the self-acknowledged attempt to select children of those parents whose ideology with respect to education matches with that of the school. For instance, differential credit points are awarded to children of businessmen and professionals (there being differences within the professional category too) based on the assumption that certain parental occupations are more conducive to a positive 'educational environment' at home. The understanding of the concept of early 'selection' is important in order to realize how economic, social and cultural capital in terms of 'monetary resources', 'social networks', 'living styles, and other cultural tools', by itself reflects and contributes to the existing structures of what Bourdieu (1970) calls, 'power relationships and symbolic relationships between classes'.

A major concern regarding the imposing socio-cultural structures in the society are that they are operative at several stages and the knowledge of there being operative at later stages of life has an important but a negative backward linkage. It may also be added that in given context of limited access to education and 'educated' unemployed, the academic qualifications by

themselves do not hold much promise unless accompanied by a rich cultural capital, that gives them an 'edge'. Therefore the likelihood of those with 'rich' cultural capital passing is not just increased.

> Class or classes which are richest in cultural capital become more and more over-represented as there is an increase in the rarity and hence in the educational value and social yield of academic qualifications. (Bourdieu, 1970; p81)

The increasing domination of a particular class in this manner gets concealed by the more visible and accepted 'academic hierarchy'. The democratic system of 'meritocracy' thus becomes a means of transmission and reproduction of social and cultural structures.

Kabeer (2006) writes that "*social exclusion reflects the multiple and overlapping nature of the disadvantages experienced by certain groups and categories of population, with social identity as the central axis of their exclusion.*" The nature of the social identity and context also influences the vulnerability a group experiences. "*Individuals are most vulnerable when they have the fewest personal capacities and material resources...*"In classrooms where inclusion is not holistic, the redistribution of product (if academic learning is seen as one) can never be equal or enabling.

Researches exploring the scenario in Delhi schools, post the high court ruling (April 2004) whereby the Delhi government directed its private schools to allot 20% seats for free to children of poor also highlight how the lack of 'expected' socio-cultural capital in Delhi schools becomes a ground of 'exclusion'. Deepa A.[5] (2008) in her article '**Discrimination in the name of inclusion**' has reported how schools claim ignorance or dole out reasons in lines of 'difficulty to cope with additional costs' or not enough number of students' to feel seats. Further instead of including the students in classrooms common to all, schedule different school timings from them citing that students would feel unable to 'adjust'. The present differences are used to reinforce the existing ones. Radhika Menon (2006) in context of the 25% reservation clause in private schools, has commented on 'the half heartedness' of the 'inclusive' practice that the school follow and how the concern for inclusion has become means of exclusion.

Reflecting on the classrooms in private schools of Delhi, Annie Koshi[6] (2007) comments how the schools only serve to reinforce the inequalities rather than addressing them.

5. www. Indiatogether. org/ stories / delhi. htm

6 . www. Solution exchange-un. net. in / education / cr -se-ed -ol 6 o /o7 d. doc.

Today schooling in delhi merely reflect social realities, and the divisiveness we see in other parts of society-in almost all walks of life today, there is reinforcement of existing inequalities, with those who can, seeking to corner as many of the benefits of the development as possible, while those who cannot are pushed further into the morass of poverty and deprivation. (Koshi, 2007;p1).

The attempts to decontextualise education by divorcing them from culture not only leads to inequitable distribution of capital but also blurs our understanding of the relationships that exist between culture and cognition or culture and learning.

Cole (2000), has written about his experience as a consultant to a mathematics project in Liberia with a members of Kpelle tribe. The project initiator reported that the local youth had far more trouble mastering mathematical concepts than students in the United States. As the researcher explored the interactions of the members outside the academic setting, they realized how their everyday living involved usage of several concepts that were mathematical. However, their context demanded different strategies and planning which were not reflected in the 'imposed' western system that was taught to them. The exclusion of their context not only led the 'teachers' and 'researchers' to perceive them as lacking the aptitude required but it also led them to teach concepts using tools and base which were alien to the students. There appeared to be an assumption that learning began at an individual level where there was no 'initial' base which could be used as a starting point. The assumption stands challenged by a theoretical argument according to which developmental functions first appear on social plane.

"Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: First on the social plane and later on the individual level.. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category and then within the individual child as an interapsychological category. This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals." (Vygotsky 1978;p 57).

Vygotsky's work on developmental psychology provides a theoretical understanding of the role cultural tools play in 'learning'.

Vygotskian Perspective

Vygotsky, a Marxist, did not separate the individual and the society. Therefore, social theory is reflected in his works on psychology, development and education, development. Vygotsky saw human development as a socio-genetic process where initial learning took place in social interactions between children and adults. He believed that education "generates" and leads development, which is the result of social learning through the internalization of culture and social relationships.

Refuting the pedagogic discourses that saw learners as passive, he identified three key elements for learning to take place are – active learners, active teachers and an active social environment. Referring to the development of child, he stated -

> "Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition..... [I]t goes without saying that internalization transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions. Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships". (Vygotsky, 1960/1981b, p. 163)

Analysing the mental functioning of human mind, Vygotsky places the social dimension of consciousness as primary and individual dimension only as secondary and derivative, "*the social dimension of consciousness is primary in time and in fact. The individual dimension of consciousness is derivative and secondary*" (1979, p. 30). The individual mental faculties that a formal education system aspires to develop therefore cannot be assumed to begin from primary base that in itself is individual and thereby context-free. Socio cultural understandings cannot be taken to follow individual ones. Vygotsky has stressed on the formation of mind within the context of everyday activities and interactions. This brings the need to understand the importance of tools mediating learning and also culture as a 'mediational tool'. An inherent property of

mediational means is that they are culturally, historically, and institutionally situated. They virtually never emerge for the first time on the basis of an individual's isolated action or reflection. Because of the socio cultural situatedness of mediational means, an approach to human mental processes grounded in mediated agency automatically focuses on the sociocultural "situatedness" of mental functioning. Citing the importance of mediational tools, Wertsch and Rupert (1993) emphasize the role of mediational tools in shaping and constraining human action.

"It is difficult, if not impossible, to have certain thoughts or memories, to formulate (let alone to solve) certain problems, and so forth if appropriate mediational means are not available. For example, the history of science provides a constant reminder that, without the appropriate cultural tools, certain problems are very unlikely to be recognized, let alone resolve" (Wertsch and Rupert, 1993, p.?).

According to Vygotsky, best method of teaching used the mediation method, which both guided and evolved through the social interaction that occurred during the learning activity. During this process the teacher does not impart knowledge but rather mediates learning through the social interaction between learner and teacher.

Vygotsky has laid considerable importance on everyday and scientific concepts in course of informal and formal learning. According to him, everyday or spontaneous concepts develop from day to day life experiences and in the course of engagement in jointly undertaken activities in his or her community. Scientific concepts on the other hand are more abstract and more general (key features- generality, systematic organization, conscious awareness and voluntary control). Development of scientific concepts has been seen as a part of his concern to explain the development of what he called, "higher mental functions and in particular, of decontextualised thinking". Scientific concepts can only be acquired as a deliberate and systematic instruction in a school setting.

He also laid considerable importance on zone of proximal development (Vygotsky , 1978). He maintained that the child follows the adult's example and gradually develops the ability to do

certain tasks without help or assistance. He called the difference between what a child can do with help and what he or she can do without guidance the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD).

Zone of proximal development- Vygotsky (1978) maintained that the child follows the adult's example and gradually develops the ability to do certain tasks without help or assistance. He called the difference between what a child can do with help and what he or she can do without guidance the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD).

Referring to Zone of proximal development as a metaphor for teaching and learning mediation that occurs between the learner and the more capable peer or adult guide, he reasons that since the individual's activity is a system within system of social relations, it cannot exist outside these relations. (Cole, 1985, 151)

Namara and Conteh (2007) have discussed the how the concept of ZPD has influenced the pedagogy in primary classrooms, through practices like 'scaffolding', and 'collaborative learning'. this has also directed focus towards the socio-cultrual research on the interaction between teacher and learner mediated through language than other broader aspects of the whole process. The observation is line with vygotsky's own perceptive on language being the carrier of cultural concepts. The pedagogic significance of this postulation also influences the role assigned to languages in classroom practices. It accords language a status of a 'cultural tool' that is contextual.

Guided by the concept of ZPD, they have termed 'teaching and learning as socio-cultural processes' having 3 main layered strands:

- Dialogic nature of teaching and learning

- Teaching and learning is culturally contextualized, both in the home and community experience that teacher and learners bring to their classrooms and in the culture of the school itself.

- Situated in the social and historical frameworks, which mediate its structure, organization, and values as well as that counts as knowledge?

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Vygotsky saw an important relationship between scientific concepts and zone of proximal development- According to Vygotsky, *"the development of the scientific.. Concept, a phenomenon that occurs as apart of the educational, constitutes a unique form of systematic co-operation between the teacher and the child. The maturation of the child's higher mental functions occurs in this cooperative process, that is , it occurs through the adult's assistance and participation"* and therefore, there exists a relationship between the scientific concepts as ZPD.

He further elaborated the relationship by also highlighting the importance of the 'everyday' contextual concepts and domain - ..." *gradual movement from and beyond concepts in for, of scientific concepts takes place in the space defined by ZPD, therein lies the interaction between two interdependent concepts (contextual and decontextualised) in a social context that is interactive and mediated"*.

It is important to note here that sensitivity to or inclusion of the 'local' or everybody', does not imply that they are ends in themselves. Instead they provide the connecting points from which opportunities may be created to develop higher thinking faculties.

National Curriculum Framework 2005

In Indian settings, the acknowledgement of the importance of socio-cultural context has begun to emerge in recent education policy documents. For instance, National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 has also argued a case for education that is sensitive to the socio-cultural context of the child. It begins by acknowledging the frequent reminders regarding importance of mother tongue, sensitivity to socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Referring to it as means of evolving a national system of education with its core component being derived from the vision of national development as enshrined in the constitution, it is guided by the Programme of Action (POA, 1992)[7] with its focus on relevance, flexibility and quality. It outlines its five guiding principles as[8]:

i. Connecting knowledge to the outside world.

ii. Ensuring that learning shifts away from rote methods.

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[8] Executive summary (p, viii), NCF2005.

7. NCERT (1992). Plan of Action.

iii. Enriching the curriculum so that it goes away from the textbook.

iv. Making examinations more flexible and integrating them with school life.

v. Nurturing an overall identity informed by the caring concerns within the democratic plurality of our country

Integration subjects with incorporation of local knowledge and skills have been much emphasized.

Part IV: Rationale of the study

Inclusive in education has various dimensions of which one is a child's socio-cultural context. Each child is located in a context from which he/she derives his/her social identity. The initial experiences of the child are crucial in the way he/she builds the schemas and learns to assign meaning to the world. When a four year old enters school for the first time, he/she is not a blank state. The child comes equipped with a rich vocabulary, socio-cultural experiences, set of developed skills and his/her own schemas. All of these can be potential tools for building a child's understanding. However when a child from a marginalised group (socio-economic, religious etc.) enters a class, he/she suffers from multiple handicaps. His/her experiences have little space in the class.

Elite private institutes which boast of quality, are seen as reproducing the existing socio-economical hierarchical structures and the government schools are often lacking the infrastructure and thereby compromising on quality. There is perhaps a need to break down certain structures and create space for alternative ways to address the 'equity' and 'inclusion problem.

In India, there have been several experiments with alternative systems and with some encouraging results. However there has been little documentation of the same and therefore the possibility to replicate them becomes difficult. (Ramchandran, 2002).

The purpose of the study therefore is to understand and document 'inclusive' approach in education with respect to the socio-cultural context of the child and see how this approach aids the cognitive, social and emotional growth of a child.

Why Digantar

Many studies have shown factors like parental illiteracy, child labour related to drop out rates. (Banerjee 2000; Nambissan 2003; Jha and Jhingran 2005) while discussing the reasons for urban poor children remaining out of school, emphasise that poverty, child labour and disinterest towards education of parents and children are the prime reasons for a large number children remaining out of the education system. However, the 'generalized' nature of such studies often tends to devoid parents coming from a particular socio-economic strata of their voice. It ignores their subjectivity and also fails to acknowledge the complexity of such issues.

To better understand the factors underlying dropout and retention one needs to move from the 'generalized' to the 'particular'. The Digantar schools present an example of a variation where despite the presence of factors that are usually reported to be related to high dropout rates, the rate of retention remains high. The schools are set in a state which has the second highest dropout rate in primary education in India. The national survey placed Rajasthan second in list of states with high rate of dropouts at primary level (56.59% in 2004-2005)[6]. What makes the success of Digantar model more significant is the fact of them being located in a religious minority community that reports the maximum dropout rates elsewhere in the country.

The purpose of selecting Digantar for the field study is not to disprove the role of factors such as parental illiteracy or child labor but rather to emphasize the underlying interactional processes that mediate the influence of these factors to yield a non-conforming positive structure. A major feature of schools like the Digantar schools are that they defy the generalized explanatory theories and bring back the agency of the parents, the children, the teachers and the community as a whole.

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[6] National sample survey, MHRD, 2007.

7. Nambissan in her paper on 'Educational Deprivation and Primary School Provision: A Study of Providers in the City of Calcutta' in Working Paper 187, Social Policy Programme, IDS, Brighton in June, 2003?

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Part V: Research questions

The broad research question - How alternative education systems can use their autonomy and flexibility in designing course content and methodology to make learning more context based, student friendly and meeting the expectations of the parents. The underlying concern is to explore if this can help in making inclusion more holistic rather than catering to a specific group that matches the social-cultural capital that the school already demands.

Specific research questions

1. What is the philosophy of the school in terms of the assumptions that the teachers have about the academic aptitude of the students and how they perceive the role of education in lives of the children of this community?

2. Are the perceptions about the role of education in lives of these children- generalized or universal or do they include the specific needs and demands of the culture?

3. In what all ways (explicit and implicit) is the socio-economic and historical context of the child included in the academic and non-academic spheres of the school?

4. What is the Relevance and appropriateness of curriculum and does the school stop at teaching what is local and everyday of is it able to facilitate students' learning of concepts that are more abstract and generalized (scientific concepts)? What is the nature of the School's relationship with the community

5. In what ways does the school facilitate a child's integration in the mainstream once the child leaves the school setting?

Part VI: Objectives

1. To study the ways in which the socio-cultural context of the child is included in the concept building and learning.

2. To study how different school practices are sensitive to the social identity and the emotional needs of the children.

3. To study the nature of school-community interaction and their involvement in each other's domain.

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Structure of dissertation

The dissertation has been divided into four chapters.

The first chapter is an attempt to understand the need for including socio-cultural context of a child in education. The theoretical perspectives which ... the importance of bringing in a child's socio-cultural context in texts and methods have also been discussed. The chapter also outlines the rationale, research questions and objectives of the research. The second chapter focuses on the methodology. The methodological framework, tools of data collection, method of analysis and the field of study have been discussed in this chapter. In the third chapter the data from various resources has been organised and the emerging themes discussed. The fourth chapter is dedicated to discussion of the themes in light of the objectives, a theoretical reflection on the findings and the broader implications of the same. The limitations of the research and a critical reflection on the pedagogic practices of Digantar have also been discussed.

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Chapter 2
Methodology

Chapter 2

Methodology

The family and then the initial years of schooling provide the primary and truly the most important context for a young child. They form the immediate network of social relationships that have a strong bearing on his developing identity. There are various issues related to education that affect the way we develop our cognitive abilities, think about ourselves, relate to others and continue with other activities in life. There is a need to understand the child in entirety since the schooling years also form an important stage in a child's psychosocial development. Socio-cultural context is an important component of this 'entirety'.

In recent years a number of educational experiments have been initiated. These include the Rishi Valley schools, Eklavya and many others. It is important that their philosophy on pedagogy and the pedagogic practices be documented and studied so that still better models can be developed which will ensure quality education for all. It is important to add that quality of education cannot not be defined by cognitive development alone.

The present research was conducted to understand the effect of including socio-cultural context of the child in education on his/her conceptual development and also his/her social identity and emotional needs. The objectives of the research were:

4. To study the ways in which the socio-cultural context of the child is included in the concept building and learning.

5. To study how different school practices are sensitive to the social identity and the emotional needs of the children.

6. To study the nature of school-community interaction and their involvement in each other's domain.

The psychological study of socio-cultural processes of a community is based on an 'intentional world' and an 'intentional community of people[7]. Considering that in an intentional world, the world and the people live in relation to each other, a space is created for multiplicity and pluralities which lie in the social exchange that happens between 'different minds'. This forms the basis of a social constructionist' view.

The study design is based on a social constructionist perspective that acknowledges subjective and shared realities that form the basis of the individual action. Researchers have shown factors such as parental illiteracy and child labour to be related to drop-out rates. It is difficult to establish a cause and effect relationship in such results. For an educationist who may want to explore alternative models of education it is important that the dynamics and processes underlying these relationships be understood. These processes may be located in the interactional space between the school and the community. It is important that the two or are not placed at opposite ends of a polarity since the two mutually define each other in an 'intentional world' that is co-constructed. With its focus on intersubjective spaces this paradigm offers entry points whereby closer analysis of the operating processes can be attempted.

The theory of social and cultural capital provides a starting point from which the questions regarding holistic education emerge. The theory points towards the failure of education to lead to socio-cultural mobility. The social-cultural capital of a child becomes a demand that a school makes of a child and thereby denying him the possibility of demanding the same from the school. Vygotskian perspective provides explanation for what makes everyday concepts embedded in the socio-cultural activities important for developing abstract and scientific thinking.

While these theories provide as a starting point from which the questions emerged and found articulation, the theories may not adequately explain certain instances where lack of economic, social and cultural capital do not halt holistic inclusion. While the theories stress on the

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[7] Shweder R. (1990) has used the concepts of 'intentional world and people' in reference to understanding of cultural Psychology in 'Cultural psychology- what is it? *Cultural psychology. Essays on comparative human development.* J.W. Stigler, R.A. Shweder & G. Herdt (Eds), 1-43. Cambridge: Harvard University press.

importance of including the context, it is necessary to attend to the processes as they happen. The purpose of this research requires a methodology that can capture the nuances of the local socio-cultural reality.

Method- Focused ethnography

"The world of nature, as explored by the natural scientists, does not 'mean' anything to molecules, atoms and electrons. But the observational field of the social scientist – social reality- has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the human beings living, acting, and thinking within it"[8].

> Ethnographic field study allow an emic view of the the interactions ... The method allows us to 'establish relations between the people and the processes to be studied' (Srivastava, 1991)[9].

The current study is an ethnographic study in an educational field setting and therefore, it would be more focused in terms of the observations and interactions. There have been several ways in which ethnography in educational settings have been understood and defined.

Ethnography relies on developing a full description of a society or a group of people and thus provides detail of their everyday lives. As a method it refers to way of studying, knowing and reporting about the world (Atkinson, 1990). Ethnographers can adopt and adapt grounded theory to increase the analytic incisiveness of their studies. Both grounded theory and ethnography have common roots in Chicago School Sociology with its pragmatic foundations. At the beginning the grounded theory methods were developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to codify explicit procedures for qualitative data analysis and simultaneous, to construct middle range theories from the data. .Though the grounded theory and ethnographic methods developed differently however as Charmaz and Mitchell put it, the two can complement each other whereby using grounded theory methods one can streamline fieldwork and move ethnographic research towards theoretical interpretations.

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[8] (Schultz, 1962: 59) (Paul Drew: discourse as topic- rethinking methods in psychology)

9. Shrivastava, V.K. (1991). The Ethnography and the people : Reflection on field work. Economic & Political weekly, vol26 (1)1475-1481

Field studied- Digantar schools

An alternative, experimental venture - Digantar in Jaipur, Rajasthan, has made significant interventions over the last two decades in the philosophy of elementary education. Inspired by David Horsburgh's teaching methods, Digantar began as a small experimental school in 1978. Over the years, Digantar has developed new curricula and pedagogic tools in the areas of language, mathematics, environmental studies, arts and handicrafts with a view to shaping general abilities and attitudes. (Ramachandran, 2002)

These are Bandhyali, Ratwali, Kho and the recent addition- Bisayatiwali. These four schools are under their AEP programme. The AEP programme is also the context where Digantar's ideas of alternative elementary education have evolved and developed.

"The pedagogy followed in the AEP and our other programmes is based on learning with understanding, self learning, cooperation with peers and freedom of pace of learning. The teachers keep records of individual children and try to chart out a course of learning, which is most suitable for an individual child, within a curricular framework... Dialogue, empathy, and cooperation form the basis of social ethos in the schools. A concern for broader social issues of equity, justice, and democratic functioning are the basis of the organization of curriculum, functioning of the schools and relationships". (Digantar, Annual Report, 2006-2007).

Sample

Digantar runs four schools on the outskirts. While two of the schools are only for primary and upper level, the third school in Bandhiyali has a secondary level which is only for the girls. Since the building of conceptual base and first experiences of 'inclusion' are experienced at the early stage of schooling, the school chosen for the purpose was a primary and upper primary school in Ratwali.

Ratwali School is one of the oldest schools of Digantar. It began in some space provided by Manzoor Ahmedji and Hamidullahji in the main village, however due to the increasing number of children it had to be shifted to its current location. Currently, there are 90 children. The

majority of students (about 90%) are Muslims. It is a primary school with 5 teachers. There are 3 classes (*samuhs*) in this school.

While the source of data in form of interviews and observation of broader school practices was not confined to a single classroom, the daily classroom observations were taken from a single class in order to confirm the consistency of the emerging data. The daily classroom observations were taken from *'Chandni Samuh'*. There are 30 students in 'Chandni' in the age group 5 – 9 ½ years. The number of years the students in this group varied from 1 – 4 years. Students joining Digantar are usually first put in *Chandni Samuh* and therefore the daily observations in this group helped in looking at how the initial concepts are formed.

Sources of Data

The data collected should be able to provide an understanding of the classroom and school practices that facilitate inclusion. The classroom practices, teaching methodology, teacher's own assumptions about the children and the socio-historic culture of the community, students comfort and experiences in the classroom and the school-parent interaction mutually interact with each other that leads to the creating of an 'inclusive' educational space.

The sources of data for the purpose were:

- Digantar's papers on its philosophy
- Annual reports
- Classroom observations
- Observations of general school practices
- Text books
- Interviews with teachers
- Interviews with the community members

Checklist for textbook review

- Emphasis on the child's existing experiences and context in form of
- Pictures

- Nature of examples

- Content

- Implicit assumptions about children

- Importance of the concept in their everyday lives

Classroom observations

- Beliefs and assumptions that are held with respect to the capabilities that a child possesses

- Resource materials

- Scope for participatory learning

- Emphasis on experiential learning

- Language of instructions

- For teachers- teaching aids, training, resource for teachers

- Structure of tests, question papers

- Process of evaluation

Semi structured interviews with teachers and parents

- Teachers

- Perspective on the role of education in a child's life/role of education in life of children of this particular community

- Knowledge about cultural values, traditions and history of the community

- Familiarity with the family context of each student

- Children

- Their experience in classroom (different subjects, teachers)

- Ability to relate the text, locate themselves in the discourse

<u>Parents</u>

- Perception of role of education in their child's life

- Do they find concepts taught in school relevant to their everyday live

- Their subjective assessment of their interactions with teacher

Procedure for data collection

The process of data collection began in second week of February with studying of reports and papers of Digantar to get familiarized with the structure and history of the school. However detailed analysis of the documents was not done in the initial stages. The analysis was postponed to ensure that the researcher's observations did not get affected by the philosophy of the school since the purpose was to infer the philosophy from the pedagogic practices within the school and then reflect on the stated philosophy in the light of observed practices.

The researcher stayed in the main Digantar campus, about 2 km away from the Ratwali branch of Digantar. during the period of stay the researcher did daily classroom observations in Digantar, Other school activities like student elections, exhibition, lunch time activities etc. were also observed. The classroom observations were guided by the checklist provided in the earlier sections. The observations were recorded in form of notes, video recordings and audio recordings. The tool of observation depended on the nature of activity in the class. The researched played the role of a non-participant observer in the class. During the lunch hours, the researcher observed the sitting arrangements of the student, peer-group interactions while playing. During the lunch hours the researcher joined the students in playing activities as it helped in building a rapport with the students and it also made the students overcome their hesitancy in class which they had initially developed in presence of the researcher.

After the school ended for the students, the researcher stayed back for interaction and interviews with the teachers. The 'end of the day report' preparation sessions and experience sharing meetings between the teachers were also observed.

The researcher visited the community for interaction and interviews with the parents of children studying in Digantar. In each of the visit, the researcher was accompanied by a Digantar teacher who introduced the researcher to the community members and also translated when either the researcher or the community member was unable to understand the other.

The preliminary analysis was done simultaneously so that first order interpretations could guide the subsequent data collection.

The textbook and document analysis was begun while the researcher was in the field so that clarifications could be sought by the teachers and pedagogic experts in Digantar.

Method of analysis – content analysis of emerging data

It is not the mere use of the methods that are indicative of paradigmatic framework but the approach towards using and analyzing the data. The framework and purpose of the study require analytic methods that would facilitate exploration and understanding of constructed experiences and meanings.

Content analysis technique was used for analyzing the data collected from the various above mentioned sources. This technique involves coding, categorizing (creating meaningful categories into which units of analysis can be placed), comparing (categorizing and establishing links between them), and concluding. (Cohen, Manion Morrison, 2007).

Chapter 3

Results and Analysis

Chapter 3

Results and Analysis

The aim of the research has been to understand the various ways in which Digantar has attempted socio-cultural inclusion in education imparted in its schools. The researcher adopted the method of focused ethnography in order to closely study the various variables that interacted with each other to create an educational space where socio-cultural inclusion could be attempted.

The following sources of data for the purpose were:

i.	Digantar's papers on its philosophy
ii.	Annual reports
iii.	Classroom observations
iv.	Observations of general school practices
v.	Text books
vi.	Interviews with teachers
vii.	Interviews with the community members

Socio cultural inclusion in school requires a certain kind of philosophy and understanding of the purpose of education and a certain kind of texts, classroom and school activities. The various aspects of inclusion can be inferred from the school's structural organization, curriculum, texts, class activities, broader school activities and practices, student-teacher relationship, school-community interactions and also the various documents published by the school. The chapter therefore, has been divided into seven parts, each of which will focus on the data from one particular source and analyze the emerging themes. The seven parts will look at the data, the emerging themes and also the analysis that can be drawn from them.

The first part of the chapter looks at the Location, History and Philosophy of Digantar which forms the broader context within which the classroom and school practices operate.

The second part of the chapter looks at the organisation of the *samuh*s with respect to the criteria based on which the students are put into different groups and regrouping takes place. This section also analyses the structural arrangement of the class and the role it plays in the nature of the child's experience of the classroom and the classroom transactions.

The third part focuses on the textbooks developed by Digantar to analyse how the pedagogy of Digantar is reflected in its textbooks and how the textbooks address the concerns of socio-cultural inclusion.

Fourth part of the chapter lays emphasis on the nature of classroom activities and method of teaching. The chapter attempts to understand the philosophy of Digantar through the various dialogic and activity based transactions that take place in the class.

A child's experience of school is not confined to the classroom. Various other school activities such as morning assemblies, lunchtime groupings and also school programmes such as exhibitions and school elections may play a role in how the child experiences the school and his/her place in it. The fifth part of the chapter looks at the other school activities and practices that occur outside the formal teaching-learning interaction.

Texts and activities by themselves may reflect a philosophy. However to translate them into meaningful teaching- learning resources may require a facilitator. The sixth part of the chapter is based on the interactions with the teachers with respect to their understanding of Digantar Philosophy and their comments on it.

The seventh part of the chapter focuses on the community's perception of education, Digantar, their own role and also the expectations they have from the school.

Part I: Digantar, its 'Alternative Elementary Education Programme and its Philosophy

Digantar Shiksha and Khelkud Samiti is located in the outskirts of Jaipur. It was established in 1978 by Rohit Dhankar and Reena Das. Digantar emerged out of a small free school for children from underprivileged sections, having 20-25 children and two teachers that operated for about 10 years from 1978 to 1988. David Horsburgh guided the school in its initial stages, and also

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trained the initial batches of Digantar teachers. Digantar was formally registered as a non profit society in 1987. The work began in the villages on the outskirts of Jaipur. The focus was on rural children.

The main Digantar campus is located in village Todi Ramjanipura, Kho-Nagorian. Alternative Elementary Education Programme is the oldest programme of Digantar. The purpose of the programme has been to develop school systems that provide quality education to all. The specific aim of the programme is to,

> 'Universalize education in our project area and to provide the community with an alternative model of elementary education'. (Annual report, 2004, p.8)

Under this programme there are four schools run by Digantar which are located in the nearby areas of Jaipur. The four schools are in Ratwali, Kho, Bandhiyali and Bisayatiwali. It is the oldest programme of Dignatar.

1. Ratwali Branch

The 'Ratwali' school was selected for the purpose of field study. It is one of the oldest schools of Digantar. It began in some space provided by Manzoor Ahmedji and Hamidullahji in the main village, however due to the increasing number of children it had to be shifted to its current location. Currently, there are 90 children. The majority of students (about 90%) are Muslims. It is a primary school with 5 teachers. After taking the fifth standard Rajasthan Board Examination, many of the children join the government schools. Some continue in the Upper Primary program of Digantar. Children of the Nagouri, Mali and Gujjar communities study here.

Picture 1: Digantar School (Ratwali branch)

Picture 2: Digantar School (Ratwali)

The school is located in the Ratwali village. It is a Muslim dominated area. Gem polishing, temporary labour, weaving and carpentry are the main occupations in this village. The village was once prosperous. However continued drought for over a decade has left the land holdings infertile. The villegers had to shift their occupation from agriculture. While most families in this village have a 'pucca' house, due to their inability to carry on agriculture their economic conditions worsened. Over the last couple of years there has been slight prosperity due to outsiders buying their land for construction purposes, however the teachers feel that due to lack of awareness the people have not been judicious in their spending and therefore this phase will not last. Right from its inception the school does not charge fee from students and provides all the needed teaching-learning material, books and stationery.

2. Philosophy of Digantar

<u>Aim:</u> The aim of education for Digantar is to help children develop rational autonomy, sensitivity, democratic and egalitarian values, dignity of labour and skills. To them, the purpose of primary education is to make the child a self-motivated and independent learner. The purpose of Digantar schools is further outlined as- *'to make the child a self-motivated and independent learner'*.

The key themes that emerge with respect to the aims of the alternative elementary education of Digantar are:

i.   The development of a rational understanding of the world (with all its socio historical as well as physical aspects) we inhabit;

ii.   The development of sensitivity towards the world;

iii.   The development of capacity (ability) to transform an idea into an object or into action.

iv.   Development of understanding and skills to interact with the world we live in

v.   Making children independent and self-motivated learners

vi.   Inculcating in children the spirit of co-operative learning

vii.   To set in motion a self-sustaining lifelong learning process

viii.   Development of capabilities and skills, academic as well as non-academic

<u>Assumptions about the child and the world</u>: The pedagogy that operates in a given socio cultural milieu depends on the assumptions and goals that are made in it about learning and the learners.

According to Digantar every human child is capable of:

i. learning to live in society

ii. defining her goals for life,

iii. finding ways of achieving the chosen goals

iv. taking appropriate action,

v. being responsible for the actions taken

Guiding the philosophy of Digantar are also Digantar's views on how the society and the world should be since one of the core beliefs of Digantar is,

"Human life is possible only in a social situation" (Digantar)

Digantar views ideal society as one of where all beings are seen as equals and there is respect for all human beings. Digantar's vision is of '*A pluralistic democratic society that safeguards justice, equity, freedom and human dignity to all its members.* The role of education in contributing to such a society is to help individuals develop independence of mind and courage to act.

<u>Pedagogy and Curriculum</u>: Digantar aims to make children become motivated, independent and lifelong learners. This requires that each child is respected as an individual and homogenisation of children be avoided. Digantar's philosophy is founded on the pedagogical principle that for children to learn with degree of freedom and motivation is to build new learning upon child's life experience. The fundamental understanding is that 'child's existing understanding and skills are the only available ground on which further development is possible'. The tools that therefore assume significance are,

"... language, basic reason, observation capabilities and core conceptual structures. Only then he can make use of the information about the larger world in strengthening and generalising his conceptual structures; to develop them to the extent that they acquire universal applicability."

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Knowledge construction or 'reformation' is the other key element of the pedagogy.

> "... the process of learning has necessarily to be the process of formation of knowledge as far as the learner's point of view goes".

Knowledge as a construction implies that the role played by the teacher is not of transferring knowledge. The teacher is not seen as the sole authority but as one who can aid the learner to build on his/her existing concepts higher conceptual structures. Digantar's philosophy view states,

> "... the teacher, who has already formed his conceptual structures, scan help the learnerto organize his experience to evolve his own conceptual structures. This much help is necessary; as no individual human being would be able to organize his experiences in these kinds of sophisticated conceptual structures alone."

It can be seen that even as the stress is on building on the existing skills, the role of teacher is one who can aid this process is also emphasized. As the two participate jointly in the process of learning, tools like language, basic reason, observation capabilities and core conceptual structures become important.

Regarding the methodology, an inseparable link is viewed between the content and the method.

> "It is clear that the content and process of education here are inseparable in practice. The content means the actual concepts, values and skills which are to be developed and the process means the chain of physical and mental activities in which the child and teacher are involved. The process always affects the content.".

The curriculum therefore addresses the concerns of both the content as well as the process.

> "... there are twin goals for the curriculum, the mastery of a certain content and a command over the process of forming that very content. They can be achieved only through curriculum. Both the parts are incomplete without each other and therefore stated alone are meaningless as far as guiding the teacher's action in the school is concerned.

This forms the philosophical basis of our endeavour of curricular development. As a result we are trying to evolve an alternative process of education which has the child's reality as its initial content; reflection and action upon that reality as process and; and the growth of understanding and development of rational, humane and democratic values as the compass to give general direction to the whole endeavour."

The basis of the Digantar's philosophy be it the emphasis on a child's existing skills or the understanding of knowledge as something that is formed and reformed, allow the space for 'local' to be included in the content as well as in the process. Such pedagogy has potential to be 'socio-culturally' inclusive.

Part II: Organization of *Samuh's*

The classroom teaching takes place in a context that is provided by the class structure in terms of both- physical arrangement and also a certain criteria based division of students in different '*samuh*' (groups). It becomes important to understand these since the student teacher –ratio, seating arrangement in a class and the aptitude or age-group based division of students into different sections play an important role in influencing the classroom transactions and often are also reflections of the same.

1.1 Admission procedure

Parents register their children's names as they reach school going age (4-5 years) and whenever the school has available seats, students are taken from the waiting list based on the serial number on the list. Preference is given to girl students however age is not a criterion for admission.

"... *Digantar mein aavshyakta pea* admission *dete hain. Primary mein yeh hai ki pehle, ki bachcha 5th ka* exam *dete hain aur jitni seats khaali hui hain..woh ek* waiting register *banaa hua hai bachon ka. Uske aadhar pe us serial mein un bachon ka admission hota hai. To usme kya hota hai ki 4 saal ka bachcha hote hi waiting list mein naam likha dete hain, yahan ke parents. Aur 5 plus waale ko hum admission dete hain.*" (In Digantar admission is given on the basis of requirement. In primary school, students give class 5 exams, and then the number for the seats that get empty there is a waiting register of children. On the basis of that children are admitted.

So what happens is that as soon as a child is 4, the parents enter the child's name is entered in the waiting list. We give admission to plus 5.)

1.2 Organization or distribution of students into different 'samuh's

There are three Samuhs (groups/sections)- Hans, Chandni, Jugnu. In each 'samuh' there are 30 students and one class teacher making the student – teacher ratio 1:30. The school practices a 'multi grade' approach (referred to as 'non-graded system by the school founder) whereby students of different age groups are put in the same class. Each student is allowed to develop the concepts at his or her own pace without having to keep pace with those who have already grasped the concept or having to wait for those who are still working at them. However, the three 'samuhs' despite the within class heterogeneity are not at the same academic level. Students who enter the school are put in 'Chandni', where as students who are nearing the class V exams are put in 'Hans'. The distribution of the students in the three 'samuh' is based on the differing abilities (kshamtaayein).

Once a year the teachers sit together to discuss if the re-grouping is required. As mentioned earlier the students who would be giving the class V exams are put in Hans so that special attention could be paid to them. Some students from Chandni may also be shifted to Jugnu after having reached a given conceptual level thereby creating space for the new admissions to Chandni. Transfer of students from one samuh to another is termed as 'regrouping' and not 'promotion'. This transfer is not based on performance in any particular exam. When a group of students reach a given conceptual level they are transferred to Jugnu, Attention is paid to the fact that another child of the same age-group also be accommodated in the new samuh even if his progress has been comparatively slower. The reasoning given is that instead of retaining a child in a samuh where most children are younger than him/her, he/she can be transferred to the higher samuh and then be made a part of the subgroup which matches his/her conceptual level.

The teacher also has the option to retain a student despite the conceptual level reached by the student if the teacher thinks that the child will be benefited more by remaining with the same teacher. However consideration is paid to the fact that child be put with his/her peer group with respect to age. A teacher on certain occasions can exercise her choice to retain a group of

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students till they pass out if she thinks their comfort level with her will aid their learning process. This pattern of distribution of students in the three *samuhs* forms the physical and psychological context in which the students and teachers function and the 'method' of teaching is brought forth.

Picture 3: Composition of the 3 samuhs

Picture 4: Attendance record; July 2008- January 2009

माह	हंस समूह		चांदनी समूह		जुगनू समूह	
	औसत	प्रतिशत	औसत	प्रतिशत	औसत	प्रतिशत
जुलाई	25	81·56%	22	71·10%	21	66·26
अगस्त	26	87·77%	22	72·17%	23	79·86
सितम्बर	25	83·73%	21	73·20%	21	65·46
अक्टूबर	21	69·04%	20	66·50%	19	56·03
नवम्बर	23	77·46%	22	72·4	23	55·4
दिसम्बर	24	79·77%	20	65·77%	22	73·33
जनवरी	26	86·16%	20	67·50%		

Multi grade approach and resulting sense of competence: From the observations above it can be inferred that the three samuhs do differ with respect to the ability of the child and to some extent

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age, however the 'multi grade' approach is reflected in the fact that no fixed time period is set by which a student 'must' have reached a particular learning level. The multi grade approach is more visible within a *samuh* than between *samuhs*. The importance of multi grade approach is that it allows the child to persist with a task or a concept till he/she has mastered it. Experience of success is important for development of a child's identity and more specifically his/her sense of industry or competence (Erik Erikson, 1968).

Flexibility in regrouping and resulting effect on child's self worth: The flexibility that is retained in regrouping of students has important psychological implications on students. The use of the term 'regrouping' when transferring a student from a group that has reached a higher level of understanding to one that is still working at it lessens the negative psychological impact on the child which terms of 'promotion' or 'demotion' can have.

The fact that a teacher has the freedom of retaining a group irrespective of the level of complex understanding they have reached helps in creating a child-friendly classroom where the separation anxiety of students can be lessened if the same appears to threatens their experience of security and comfort. However it may be added that the option of a teacher choosing to stay with a group till they leave Digantar is not a frequently exercised choice since it may reinforce the dependence the students have developed on a particular teacher. To encourage such a development would be against the aim of Digantar to make students independent and motivated learners.

## 1.3 Physical organization/arrangement of the class

The children sit on a mat spread on the floor. The classroom walls are covered by various theme charts and art works of students. There are various theme charts such as a chart on 'names of fruits', 'name of body parts', 'different types of birds' etc. There are some other charts which have been made by the teachers and students together. There are subject charts like multiplication tables, counting and alphabets, there are also duty charts where the daily duties of children (cleaning, filling water, writing news, etc., are written down. Some charts made are based on some local context (festivals) and local issues (flood in Rajasthan). In every class there are pin up boards where the drawings, craft work and write up by students are put up. There is

equal space for all children to be able to put up their work and irrespective of whose work is the 'best' or 'not so good'. These boards are changed regularly as new concepts are taught and new craft work learnt. On the back wall of the class there is a cupboard where the worksheets for students, stationery, text books, colours and other teacher-learning material is kept. The student, with the permission of the teacher, can take out the material required by him/her. The wall at the back also has racks for each student where the student can keep his/her bag, stationary, class work etc. A clay pot is also kept near the door in which the children fill water every morning.

The seating arrangement is not fixed and depends on the activity being carried out in the class. The students may sit in lines facing the front wall if the teacher is using the blackboard. During morning 'sabhas' the children sit in a large circle of which teacher is also part. In other classes where work is given on the basis of the level of conceptual understanding each child has reached, the children are arranged into different subgroups and they sit in their own group. Unless the teacher is using the board, the students sit in a circle with students doing similar assignments often sit together (though not necessarily- the choice in most occasions lies with the children). Work in class happens both individually and in group. When students work individually or in groups the teacher moves from one group or student to another as and when they require her to explain, clarify doubts or to show their work. The teacher moves within the circle from one student to another to clear their doubts and look at their work. Students from different groups however keep coming to the teacher to clarify their doubts. After the teacher completes the round after having seen each students work and noting their progress, the period is usually over and it is time for the next subject to be taken up.

Picture 5: Shelves for children
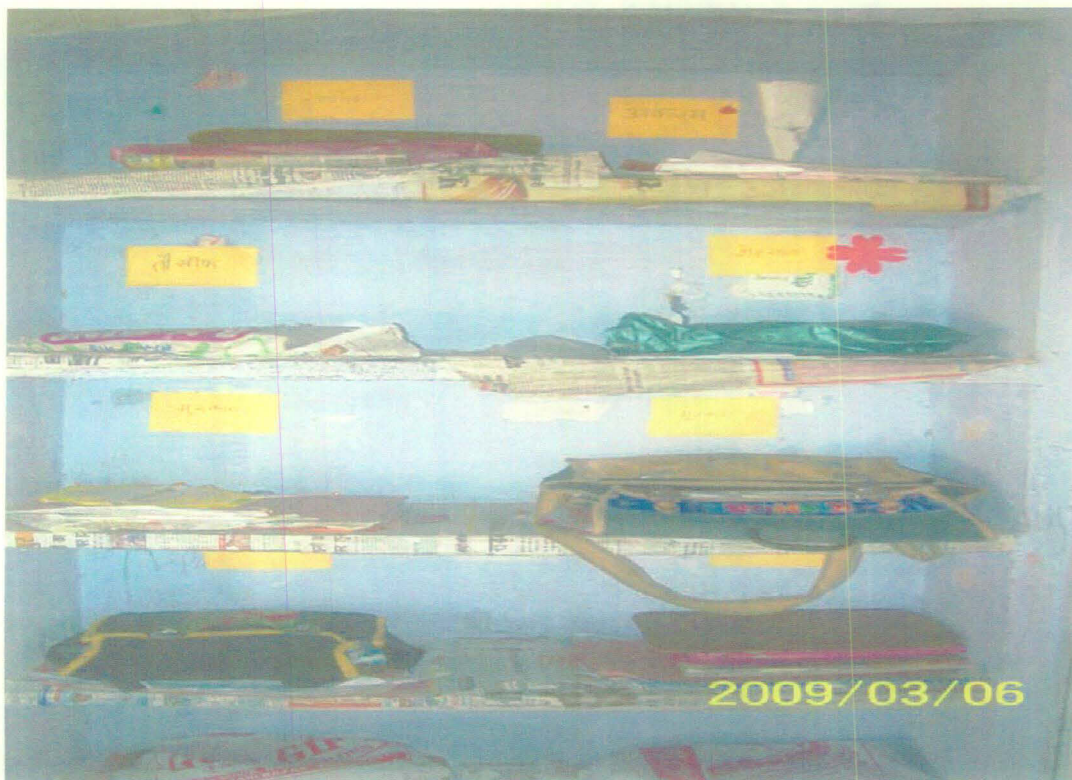
Picture 6: Classroom walls

Picture 7: Seating arrangement during *sabha*

Picture 8: Teacher explaining a concept to a 'subgroup' in the class

The arrangement therefore is not fixed or marked by mechanical rotation. The arrangement is defined by the learning pace, ability and understanding reached by each child.

Structure and organisation of the classroom and its effect on child's learning space: In Digantar, the physical structure and organisation of the classroom appear to be spaces of learning by themselves as they provide the child with multiple visual inputs and also allow for child's creativity to be displayed. The fact that there is space for each child's creation on the boards reflects a sensitivity that each child has his/her own creative processes that are unique and to be respected.

The personal space given to each child for keeping his or her books and stationary also provides individual space for the child.

Part III: Textbooks

4 subjects are taught in Digantar Ratwali which takes students till upper primary level or class 5. The subjects taught are- Hindi, Maths, Paryavaran, English, and Kala. Digantar has prepared its own set of textbooks for the students in the subjects- Hindi, paryavaran, and maths. They follow the Rajasthan state books for English. Rajasthan state books are also introduced for other subjects at a later stage since the students also have to prepare for the state exam in class 5. The books in all the subjects are organised on the basis of number series where as the series number increases the level of conceptual complexity also increases. Since the focus is on the 'inclusive processes' of Digantar, the focus has been on the texts prepared by Digantar.

The there are 6 set of books prepared by Digantar:

1. Bhasha Vikas Shrinkhla (language development series)
2. Ganit Bodh set (maths)
3. Paryaavaran adhyayan set (environmental studies)
4. aarambhik gatividhiyaan (beginning activities)
5. hastkarya (crafts)
6. Bhasha nai pustakein (new language books)

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3.1 Paryavaran

There are 9 books which have been prepared for this subject.

1. paryavaran adhyayan -aarambhik gatividhiyaan,

2. paryavaran adhyayan - jungle ki sabha,

3. paryavaran adhyayan -hum sab,

4. paryavaran adhyayan- tab, ab aura aage

5. apne aas paas (a 5 book series from 1- 5)

The first book – '*paryavaran adhyayan -aarambhik gatividhiyaan*', begins with a preface that emphasizes the role of activities in learning at primary level. There is an acknowledgement that it is the new teachers who face the difficulty of thinking up new activities that can be used with children. The activities given in the book have been compiled by Digantar teachers who use these activities in their classes. There are 41 activities in the book. The teachers are not compelled to finish all 41 activities or to strictly follow the activities as outlined. The activities begin with discussion on children's homes, their family, festivals, themselves, their body parts, the things of their everyday usage like- clothes, fruits, vegetables. From vegetables and fruits the activities then move to activities like agriculture, what agricultural involves, animals related to it, birds and so on. Towards the end of the book the activities move from discussing things and surroundings to analyzing the same in terms of learning to classify them into heavy and light, soluble and insoluble, living and non-living.

The 5 work books- '*aas paas*' are also based on the concepts dealt with in the first book- *paryavaran adhyayan -aarambhik gatividhiyaan*'. The work books allow the children to work at the concepts themselves and revise the same thereby strengthening their understanding. The workbooks are arranged in a progressive serial order. The activities involve use of local materials, senses (smell, touch, taste) and home context.

The remaining three books, '*Jungle ki sabha*', '*Hum sab*' and '*Tab, ab aur aage*', are interactive texts centered out any one theme where the text or the story is carried forward by way of

activities to be completed by the students. For instance, in the 2 book- *Jungle ki sabha*, there are several activities centered on the themes of animals and birds. The book is weaved around a story and the story is carried forward by the activities that children need to perform. As different animals are contexts are introduced, the story takes a break and the activities are performed. For instance, in a point at the story when the character of a bird has to be introduced, there is a break and an activity is introduced where students are to go out identify different kinds of birds, learn their names and then take the story forward through them.

3.2 Hindi – *bhasha vikaas shrinkhala* (Language development series) -20 book series

1. Bhasha aarambhik gatividhiyaan

2. Matraa card set (9)

3. shabd chitra card sets (42)

4. workbooks – pothi (pehli se chauthi- 1 to 4)

5. bhasha vikaas shrinkhala 1-12 (in order of learning ability)

6. shikshak ki pustak (teacher's book)

To be able to understand more conceptual texts/narratives- a basic knowledge of words, writing and reading is required. The 4 book series (*pothi*) - are a preparation to the 'bhasha vikaas shrinkhala or series.

Aarambhik gatividhiyaan: the activities suggested in the book includes narrating stories, understanding stories through picture cards (picture stories), discussions on objects used at home, festivals, animals, describing exercises, riddles, poems in order to familiarize the child with language and enable him to use it for verbal expression. The books also mention 'performing plays' as an important activity which may help children use language to express emotions, carry out conversations rather than just expressing a view in the class and stopping at that. The activities help students develop comfort in the language that moves beyond writing, reading and text and answering questions. Several activities also require the children to use language

imaginatively. For example, asking the students to make sentences or answer questions like-
"what if you are a lion?"

The initial activities include identifying sounds of different words, alphabets. Games like
'antakshri', where students are divided into groups and each group is required to say a word that
begins with the last alphabet of the word spoken before that, helps in remembering more words
and also identifying the alphabets in them.

While the book on '*aarambhaik gatividhiyaan*' orient the child towards the 'oral' language, the 4
'*pothis*' focus on reading and writing. Arranged in progressive order they begin with learning to
read and write alphabets, words and later sentences. These workbooks prepare the child to move
to more complex and meaningful texts like stories where the child moves from reading words
and sentences to understanding ideas and themes.

These 4 books are followed by a 12 series of '*Bhasha Vikaas Shrinkhala*' books. The series
begin with simpler lessons which may be a story or a poem. While the initial few stories may be
read in no certain order, the last few ones are more complicated and arranged according to
increasing complexity. For example, while the average length of a 'story' in the first 4 books is
2-3 pages, the length of a story in the last book of the series is 5 pages. With increasing order of
series letter writing and plays are included in the book. The lessons in the last four books are also
in smaller font size. Each lesson is followed by various in each of the book is followed by
activities which include question answers, word meanings and making sentences.

While the books in '*Bhasha vikaas shrinkhala*' are designed to develop a child's competency in
use of Hindi is a medium of communication (written and verbal), the guide book to the teachers
also directs teachers to be sensitive to the mother tongue and work towards a smooth transition
from the mother tongue to Hindi. The book for teachers -'*shikshak ki pustak*' says, "*hamein
baalak ko avsar dena chahiye ki veh apni matrabhasha (jo samaantah koi sthaaniya bhasha hoti
hai) se sahaj roop se manak bhasha par aa sakein. Bina dabaav mahsoos kiye tatha bina apni
bhasha ko heen tatha tyaajay mahsoos kiye*" (we should give the child the opportunity that
he/she should be able to move ... from the mother tongue-which normally is the local language-
to the..., without feeling forced or feel that their language is inferior and can be done away
with).

3.3 Mathematics

There are 16 books that have been prepared for Mathematics. Of these 16 books, the first book is on *Aarambhik Gatividhiyaan* (beginning activities) and the remaining 15 books are workbook series '*Ganit Bodh*'.

Aarambhik gatividhiyaan: The first book in the series, it is based on the understanding of what a child of 5-6 years brings to the classroom. It may be reminded that a child can gain entry to Digantar only after he/she has attained 5 years of age. There is an acknowledgement of the need to establish link between home and school when the child first enters school. "*yeh maana ja sakta hai ki bacha jab shuruaat mein vidhyalaya aata hai, to veh ek prakaar ke maahol se doosre alag prakaar ke maahol ke sampark mein aata hai. Bacha svabhavtah khelna, svtah kuch banana aur mauj masti pasand karta hai. .. vidhyalyon ke prati aruchi ke vibhin karno mein se vidhyalya mein bachon ke liye upyukt maahol na hona ek vishisht kaaran hai.".. yeh gatividhiyaan ganit seekhne ki purva tayaari ke roop mein hain. Yeh bache ko jahaan kuch karne ka, khelne-kudne ka avsar deti hain, wahin doosri aur kuch aisi kshamtaaien bhi bache mein aati chali jaati hain jo aage ganit seekhne mein uski madad karti hain*" (it can be assumed that in the beginning when a child comes to a school he comes from one kind of environment and gets in touch with another kind of environment. The child naturally likes to play, makes things by himself and enjoy. Among several reasons for disinterest in school the absence of appropriate environment in school is one of the mains one reasons. These activities are like preliminary for learning Math. On one hand they provide a child an opportunity to do something, to play and on the other hand they also help in building competencies which keep building and will help children in learning math late).

There are multiple activities for a single concept. For example, for counting, the different activities suggested include- poems, number cards, games (dog-and- the bone – to learn and recall numbers orally). Just as there are several activities to teach a single a single concept/lesson, a single activity can be used for learning multiple or several concepts. For example, the game –dog and the bone can also be used to teach names of seasons, months, colours etc. this idea of multiple usage of a single activity is suggested in the book itself.

In the workbooks *'Ganit Bodh'* (1-14), different concepts are introduced with different exercises for each. In the initial workbooks, there is a continuity between concepts and the different concepts are not placed under different chapter heads. For instance in *Ganit Bodh-2*, exercises on counting gradually lead to exercises on addition without break in form of one lesson and another beginning. There is also back and forth movement between concepts. For example in *Ganit Bodh* – 9, the concepts dealt with are number line, multiplication tables, addition (carry over) and division. However the concepts are not divided into different chapters. An exercise on number line is followed by an exercise that involves dividing the number line in groups of 3, followed by an exercise on multiplication tables where each concept leads to the next one. The exercises on addition and number lines are repeated later in order to use them to build more complex concepts like addition involving carrying over and word problems. Exercises on similar concepts are repeated across workbooks allowing students to revise and strengthen the concepts developed so far.

The only workbooks to be divided into chapters are the last two books in the series, *'Ganit Bodh'*. The chapters in the two books include money, days and months, shapes, measurements and time.

The common features observed in the books across subjects include:

1. Emphasis on activities- there are numerous references to the fact that a good text without appropriate involvement is not sufficient. Learning by doing is the mainstay of the curriculum. By emphasizing on activities the textbooks strengthen the connection between content and method. The exercises prescribed especially in the initial workbooks lay focus on activities like exploration of the environment (looking for different kinds of stones), handling of objects (picking them and arranging them in a line), observation (identifying similarities between different stones) and using them meaningfully (putting all the round ones in one group and the irregular ones in another group). These activities serve to orient the child to be able to use the materials found in the surroundings 'actually' or 'symbolically' to build understanding and also to sharpen their ability to observe, reflect and analyze.

The activities included in the book not only borrow materials from the context but also simulate real setting transactions when the teaching of a concept so requires. For instance, in the chapter on money in the last workbook in math, one of the activities is in a form of a game that requires students to make notes of different denominations on paper. The game is played between two people, where each person picks up a card and has to give the amount written on the card to the other person. The notes of different denominations are distributed in a way that the exact amount cannot be given without having to

The activity such as the one above not only familiarizes the children with the context but also enable them to develop abilities to respond to situations arising in such a context.

2. Example from and references to context: the books draw actively from the child's physical and social context to build concepts. The emphasis on drawing from context is can be found in the prefaces of most books. For instance, the preface of the mathematics book, 'ganit bodh', an excerpt from the preface reads, *"shikshak pustak- bhasha vikaas shrinkhala- "samagri bache ki samajh (jo usne ab tak seekha hai aur jo kshamtaayein arjit ki hain) aur parivesh se judti hui hain, usse aage badhein"*. (materials which the child understands [whatever he/she has learnt and the capabilities he/she has acquired till now] and are related to the contexts should be taken forward). (Ganit Bodh, p.)

3. Creating opportunity for students to become independent learners: Another attempt in the texts is that try not to make students completely dependent on teachers for the purpose of understanding. for several subjects there are different guide books meant for teachers to help them *(bhasha vikaas shrinkhalaa- shikshak ki pustak) – shikshakon se- "bachon ko shikhshak ki kam se kam madad ki zaroorat pade"; samagri aisi ho jo ki seekhne ki kala/dakshta ko aage badhaaye aur usse svaavlambi shikshaarthi banaane mein madadgaar saabit ho.* (children become depend less and less on teacher. material should be such that art of learning and abilities develop more and help him/her become self-reliant student).

4. Scope of revision in workbooks: the numerous work book developed for different stages of conceptual understandings allow the children to practice extensively. The activities at the back of a lesson are often limited and cover a limited range of understanding. In activity workbooks, the understanding is divided over a longer range providing children more time to engage with a concept. The different workbooks also help children to individually practice the concepts taught, taking help when required. Considering that it isn't imperative that all students do the same book at a given time, it allows them to work at their own pace.

5. Emphasis on illustration and non-bulkiness: the books are mainly in form of think workbooks. The non- bulkiness of the boom may make the book appear less intimidating to the student. The high proportion vis-à-vis written text also helps make the text appear more interesting and less intimidating to the child. The visual input by way of illustrations strengthens the impression made on the child by the written text alone.

6. Linkages between subjects in the text: Some of these activities are similar to those suggested in books for '*Paryavaran*' and it provides two benefits. Since the books on "paryavaran' are in Hindi and involve several discussions, they by themselves facilitate use of Hindi for self-expression. Secondly, since some of the themes of discussion are similar, it enables children to engage with them for a longer duration.

7. Acknowledging the need for teacher training: The preface of the books and the instructions lay emphasis on the need for teacher training. For instance, in the 'Bhasha Vikaas Shrinkhala', excerpts from the preface read, "*yeh keh dena aavshyak lag raha hai ki koi bhi padhati ya shikshan samagri apne mein poorna nahi hoti. Samagri ka poora labh uthate hue bachon ko sekhaana shikshak se shikshan ke tareekon ki achi samajh aur vibhin prakaar ke pryatnon ki maang karta hai. Atah shikshak jahan uchit samjhe bachon ke star ko dekhte hue is samagri ko apne tareeke se upyog kar sakta hain. Iske saath aur samagri mila sakte hain. Is samagri mein pher badal kar sakte hain*" (it is important to say that any studying or teaching material are not complete in themselves. To be able to make full use of the materials to teach children, teaching requires the teacher to have a good understanding of teaching methodology and various kinds of efforts. Therefore, the

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teacher can use the material where he thinks it may be appropriate keeping in mind the level of the children. They can add more materials to these and play around with the materials).

Part IV: Nature of classroom activities and method of teaching

'Chandni Samuh' was the group selected for daily observations. Since the age group of the students in this group is the lowest, the observations in the class helped in better looking at the process of concept building in the initial stages of learning. Before looking at the classroom activities and the teaching methodology, it would be useful to first look at the class composition in terms of age and years in Digantar and also the time table which is followed daily.

TABLE 3.1: List of students with information on their age, gender and number of years in Diganta

S.No.	Names	Gender	Date of Birth	Age	Date of admission	No. of yrs in school
1.	Younus	M	21.06.1999	9 ½	15.01.2005	4
2.	Imran	M	24.08.1999	9 ½	15.01.2005	4
3.	Parveen I	F	14.10.1999	8	15.01.2005	4
4.	Azharuddin	M	17.10.1999	8	15.01.2005	4
5.	Mobeen	M	10.01.2000	8	15.01.2005	4
6.	Vakeel	M	07.04.2000	8	15.01.2005	4

7.	Dinesh	M	01.08.1999	9 ½	15.02.2006	3
8.	Shazia	F	20.02.2000	9	01.08.2006	3
9.	Parveen II	F	11.07.2000	8	01.08.2006	3
10.	Shahnaz II	F	06.11.2000	8 ½	01.08.2006	3
11.	Salma	F	16.07.1999	10	26.03.2007	2
12.	Shoaib	M	11.12.2000	8	26.03.2007	2
13.	Shohail	M	08.05.2001	7	26.03.2007	2
14.	Uzma	F	14.11.2001	7	26.03.2007	2
15.	Aaqib	M	15.12.2001	7	26.03.2007	2
16.	Akshat	M	03.12.2001	7	23.04.2007	2
17.	Ajay	M	18.04.2002	7	08.05.2007	2
18.	Saddam	M	10.04.1998	11	12.05.2007	2
19.	Shabbir	M	08.06.1999	9	09.07.2007	2
20.	Rashid	M	20.08.2001	7 ½	09.07.2007	2

21.	Wajid	M	04.05.2002	7	11.07.2007	2
22.	Abhishek	M	03.04.2001	8	16.07.2007	2
23.	Muskaan	F	12.08.2002	8 ½	25.07.2008	1
24.	Suhana	F	28.03.2003	6	25.07.2008	1
25.	Shahnaz II	F	18.06.2003	6	25.07.2008	1
26.	Salman	M	15.07.2002	7	29.07.2008	1
27.	Umar Farooq	M	20.04.2003	6	29.07.2008	1
28.	Rizwana	F	20.06.2003	6	22.09.2008	1
29.	Sana	F	10.08.2003	5 ½	01.10.2008	1
30.	Rehnuma	F	16.10.2003	5 ½	01.10.2008	1

The multigrade nature of the classroom can be inferred from age-range which is from 5 ½ to 9 ½ years and the range of years in Digantar from 1 to 4 years.

4.1 Time Table

Table 3.2 : time table

Time period	Subject/class
9.00 – 9.15	Cleaning
9.15 – 9.50	Sabha
9.50 – 10.00	Short break
10.00 – 10.40	Hindi
10.40 – 11.20	English
11.20 – 12.10	Math
12.10 – 1.00	Lunch Break
1.00 – 1.40	Environment(surroundings - Paryavaran)
1.40 – 3.00	Arts (kala)
3.00	School ends for students
3.00 – 5.00pm	Lesson planning and discussion by teachers

Considering that the same teacher takes all the classes, the teachers have the flexibility to carry on a particular subject class a little longer, if they feel the need for the same. The transition between two different subject periods is also smoothened by the fact that the students don't have to wait for a new teacher. Being aware of the conceptual difficulty experienced in the previous class, a teacher might also change the order of the periods if he/she feels that some difficult concepts have been introduced and therefore the subsequent period should be a relatively light one. Sometimes students might themselves express a desire for a particular subject to be a taught at a given time.

Sabha is the first classroom activity of the day. The duration is 35 minutes. The subsequent sections of this part look at the classroom observations in the various classes. There is a 15 minute short break after *sabha*, after which the subject periods follow. Three subjects are taught before the lunch break begins. These are Hindi, English and Math. Post lunch subject periods are 'paryavaran' and 'kala'. Each class is of 40 minutes duration except the 'kala' class which is for 70 minutes. This is scheduled at the end of the day from 1.40 p.m. to 3.00 p.m., however, the last minutes are reserved for cleaning the classroom and preparing to leave the school.

4.2 Sabhas

Unlike the morning assemblies that take place in most schools, there is no combined assembly in Digantar schools. Instead there are 'sabhas that are held in each class every morning. After the cleaning process all the students of a given class gather inside and form a circle. The teacher a co-participant in the activities conducted and rather than the teacher it is the students who take turns to become the facilitator in the various activities. This is a time when students and teachers share information and participate jointly in activities that have been decided for a given day. The information could be in form of announcements regarding some school event, or students informing the teacher about any student being ill or for any reason unable to come to class in the class. The school works from Monday to Saturday and the *sabhas* are held from Monday to Friday.

The theme/agenda for the daily *sabhas* is as follows:

    i.   Monday - poems

ii. Tuesday – singing and dance

iii. Wednesday – outdoor games

iv. Thursday – performing plays

v. Friday – sharing jokes and riddles

The main feature of the *sabha* are:

i. The activities are performed collectively and each student gets a turn to participate.

ii. While the teacher moderates the *sabha*, students take turns to take the lead or conduct the *sabha*. For e.g., a student might be selected to lead the group while reciting a poem or allotting parts in a play. The turn rotates between student and there is no permanent leader

iii. The teacher is also a participant in the activities. For e.g., the teacher would also join students in singing, reciting poems or sharing riddles and jokes. They would also be required to follow the actions when a student takes turn to recite poem with others following him/her.

iv. While sharing jokes, riddles and stories the students often switch to their local language and they are seldom interrupted.

v. The folk tradition of the place in form of songs and dance is encouraged

vi. In some *sabhas* the activity may also incorporate parts of lessons drawn from different subjects that students may have been learning recently. For example in one of the *sabhas*, students were encouraged to attempt to perform plays in English based on any of the few stories that they may have learnt during the preceding weeks. Poems may also be based on lessons that are being taught during that week. Thereby links are formed between activities and concepts which also result in students revising the concepts.

vii. The activities even if they are guided by lessons taught, are not very structured thereby allowing students to bring out their ideas. Even as a theme may be selected, there is space for students' own creativity.

The observations highlight the nature of collective and interactive participation of students as performers and audience. The extent to which a child carries his everyday life from home to school was also visible in several plays.

4.3 Subject classes

In line with the multi grade approach there may be more than one concept being taught at a given time in the class. The seating arrangement depends on the concepts being taught. If a single concept is being taught, the students may be seated in a big circle or all facing the blackboard. If students are working according to their individual competency reached, they form different groups and sit. For instance, in an English class while one group may be asked to read a story, identify difficult words and look for their meanings; another group that has completed this stage may then be asked to translate the story in Hindi. In a language class the different sub-groups may also do qualitatively different works and not just different stages of the same task. For instance- some might be reading and learning a chapter, another set may be absorbed in writing and another group might be reading aloud to their teacher so that the teacher might correct their speech errors- mispronunciation, not being able to put together the alphabets and say the word.

The following accounts from classroom observations in each of the 3 subjects on different days will help illustrate the point.

1. English- The class started with students forming one big circle. The teacher told the class that they would begin the class with reciting poems in which one by one students would volunteer to recite poems and the remaining class will repeat the poem with actions. Several students volunteered to recite a poem and the first activity of the class was conducted. The second activity involved the teacher using different set of cards to help children revise the concepts of names of colours, birds, and objects in English. First the teacher selected a set of cards and

showed them one by one. The children would identify and name the colour/object in chorus. This was followed the teacher displaying a card one by one and the students then took turns to name what was shown in the card. As each students named the object and the colour, the other children cheered by screaming – 'good or very good'. The students were quick to prompt a classmate who could not remember the right name.

The above two exercises were followed by students completing their class work (reading, writing) with the teacher moving from one student to another to see how each child was fairing. Students belonging to different subgroups were reading different levels of books (arranged in ascending order). E.g., while some students had reached level of 'Aravali English reader- 4, there were some others who were yet to complete book 3 of the series.

2. <u>Math</u>: As in the English class, the students were made to sit in different circles, and the students did their class work. The book referred by students was '*ganit bodh*'. The students followed different series of the same book depending on the concepts they had built so far. The various levels at which different students worked were:

i. counting & addition and subtraction

ii. before and after (While writing down the before and after assignment, the students often referred to the counting chart displayed in one of the class display board)

iii. Multiplication tables - multiplication was taught using the concept of addition.

3. <u>Hindi</u>: In the first class- The teacher talked to children and asked them which work-book series they were doing or which story they had reached in the '*Bhasha vikaas shrinkhala*' (Language development series). He then made the students at similar level in a group. In this way some groups were formed. The teacher instructed- "".*ab aap sab groups banaake bethoge. Ek group ke bache aamne –saamne bhethnge aur milke kaam karenge. Aapko ek doosre ki madat karni hai. Unka kaam dekhna hai aur jab padhenge to unhe sun na hai. Main eke k karke sab ke paas aaoongi.* (Now all of you will sit in groups. Students of each group will sit face to face and work together. You have to help each other. See each other's work and listen to them when they read. I will come to each of you one by one).

The teacher did not go to each and every child individually but attended to them group wise. He went to individual students when they asked for help. When asked as to why each child was not individually attended to, he explained that their aim of helping was to assist children develop their own competency rather a 'dependency' on the teacher. He further added that by forming groups, students learnt to work collectively, help each other and in the process further their own understanding.

4. <u>Paryavaran (Environment)</u>: The subject deals with issues and things that are relevant to the child's context. The various issues discussed include gender roles in family; exploring the nearby surroundings and finding different objects which can be then discussed; discussing and writing about local festivals and culture, etc. Most of these classes were interactive in nature where the 'Environment' learning was based on encouraging the child to actively interact or observe his/her surroundings. For instance in *"paryavaran'* class held on 24 February 2009, the students were introduced to the concept of 'gender roles'. The teacher made the students sit in a circle/The students sat in circle with the teacher sitting as a part of the circle and not at the centre of it. The topic of discussion was – *"Striyon aur puroshon ke kaam ke bare mein jaan na"* (To know about the works men and women perform). As soon as the topic was written on the board, a male student commented- *"mahilaayen zyaada kaam karti hain"* (women do more work). The teacher then elaborated on the topic for discussion. The excerpts from the classroom transaction:

Teacher: *stree aur purush kya kaam karte hain- bhai behen, mummy-papa, nana-naani... yeh kya kya kaam karte hain?* (what work do women and men do- brother-sister, mummy – papa, maternal randmother-father..)

Student A (loudly)- *aur daada daadi* (paternal grandfather- mother)

Student B- *aur bhaiya bhabi* (and brother and sister-in-law)

Teacher- *haan yeh sab kaaka-kaaki. Un sabke alag alag kaam hote hain na? apne* ghar mein baant lete hain ki yeh kaam main karoonga, yeh kaam tum karoge... (Yes, these all-uncle-aunts. They all have different works right? Divide work in their homes like this work I'll do, this work you do...)

Teacher- *ab ek ek karke hare ek jana bataayega... ek ek karke .hum kram challenge. Jaise idhar se. ab* Uzma *bataayeng. Ek ek karke..ki mahilaayein kya kaam karti hain aur purush kya kaam karte hain. Sabko mauka milega.* (looking at Uzma-)- *ghar pe sab kaam karte hain na? mummy kya kaam karti hain, papa kya kaam karte hain, bhai kya kaam karta hai, behen kya kaam karti hai. (To* all) *sabko pata hai na? hum baad mein likhne ka kaam karenge aur chitra bhi banaaenge ki kaun kya kaam karta hai. Theek hai?* (Now one by one each person will tell... one by one. We will go in serial order. Like from here. Uzma will say. One by one that what work women do and what work men do. Everyone will get an opportunity. Everyone works at home right? What does mummy do what does papa do, what work does brother do, what work does sister do? Everyone knows right? We will do writing later. Will we make pictures also of who does what, ok?)

Uzma – *papa...* (stop)

Uzma- *papa dukaan javat... kapda lyaavat aur murgi, murga ..aur bakri lyaavat, aur charka chalaavat*[9] .....(papa goes to shop... brings clothes and cock and hen... and goat and spins yarn).

Teacher- *aur mummy ka kya kaam karti hai?*(... And what work does mother do?)

Uzma – *bartan dhovat, paani layaavat, roti pakaavat...* (Washes clothes, brings water, cooks 'roti').

(At this point Uzma became unsure about whether cooking food was work)

Teacher- *khaana bhi banati hai?*(she cooks food?)

Uzma – *haan* (yes)

Teacher- *yeh bhi ek kaam hai na!* (this is also a work right!)

Once the discussion was over the students were asked to write a few lines on the works performed by men and women and also draw to show them working. Another teacher meanwhile joined the class and then asked students to go home and see what all work their parents did and if they liked doing them.

Teacher - *kiske papa khaana banaate hain?* (Whose father cooks food?) At this one boy raised his hand but rest were all silent. The teacher asked again, *"Kiske papa kabhi kabhi kehte hain ki*

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[9] There was a continuous prompting from other students about what her father did.

aaj shaam ko tum ghumo ya araam karo aur main khaana banata hoon? [whose alls fathers sometime say –(to mother) that today evening you go out or rest and I will cook food?

(There was no response)

Teacher: *Acha kis kis ke papa kapde dhote hain?* (ok, who all's fathers wash clothes?) *Acha raat ko deri se kaun aata hai? Mummy ya papa?* (ok, who comes late at night, mummy or papa?)

Students- (in chorus)- Papa

Teacher- *acha ab bataao, agar gaon mein panchayat ho to kaun jaayega papa ya mummy?* (ok, if there is a *Panchayat* meeting in the village, who will go, papa or mummy?)

Students: Papa

Teacher- *aaj ghar jaake mummy se puchna ki aapko bahar ghoom ne jaana acha lagta hai kya? Chupke se poochna (laughing)*.(Ok, today go home and ask mummy if she likes going out? Ask quietly [laughing]).

As the class continued, she also asked them to talk to their mothers and sisters and ask them if they would like to do some of the works then men did or vice-versa. The purpose was to help children understand the division of work, think about the underlying belief/logic and think over the fairness of the division. By locating the concept in their real life settings, the teacher not only used a child's real life context to build understanding but also helped in a building a 'critical' approach that could be used to critically reflect on the same context.

Drawings and discussions on issues related to child's life and that of his/her community were the focus of most Paryavaran classes. These activities allowed the children to express their curiosity, doubts and share their subjective experiences. The village's local history, festivals and flora and fauna found in the region were some of the topics discussed. The discussions were often followed by essay writing, drawing or scrapbook collection.

The discussions that began with local region as the focus were gradually taken forward to a broader context. The discussions and activities regarding on festivals included a regional festival like 'shab-e-baraat' and then moved to festival like Christmas' that was not celebrated in that region.
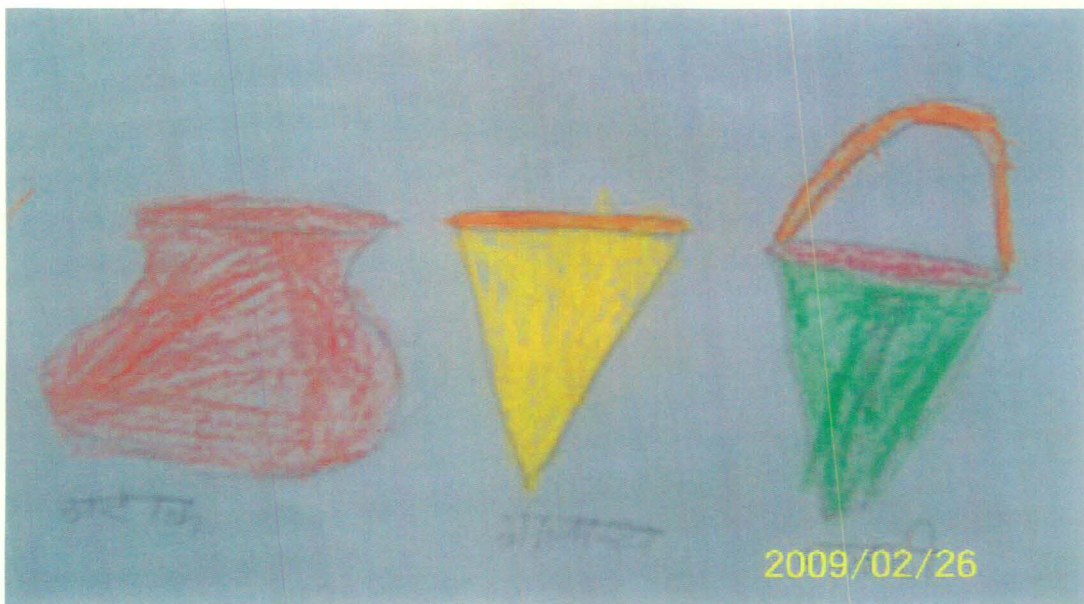
Picture 9: Home and family

Picture 10: Types of leaves

Picture 11: Things used at home

Pictures 12& 13: Shab-e-baraat

Picture 14: Rakshabandhan

रक्षावन्धन का त्यौहार
बहन भाई के लगाकर
मीठाई खीलाकर हाथ में
रक्षा सूत्र बांधती है 7
इसके विधु एककिवद नि
ल की मेवाड़ राज्य पर
गुजरात के मानवा राज्य
के राजा द्वारा आकमण
से बचने के लिए पमवती
मे दिल्ली के बादशाह हुमायूं
के लिए अपनी रक्षा के लिए
रक्षासूत्र यादगार के रुप
में मनाते है ।

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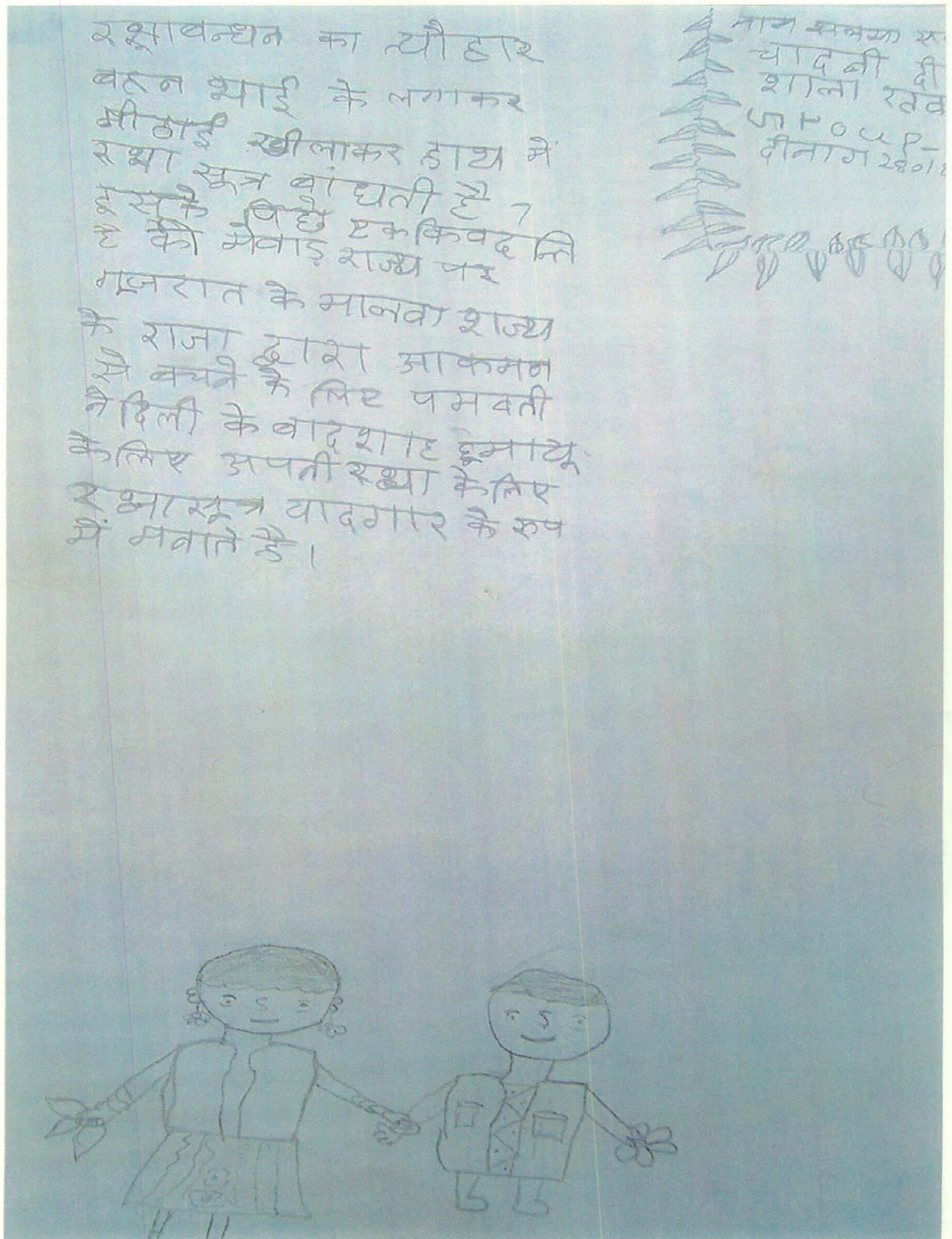
Picture 15: Rakshabandhan
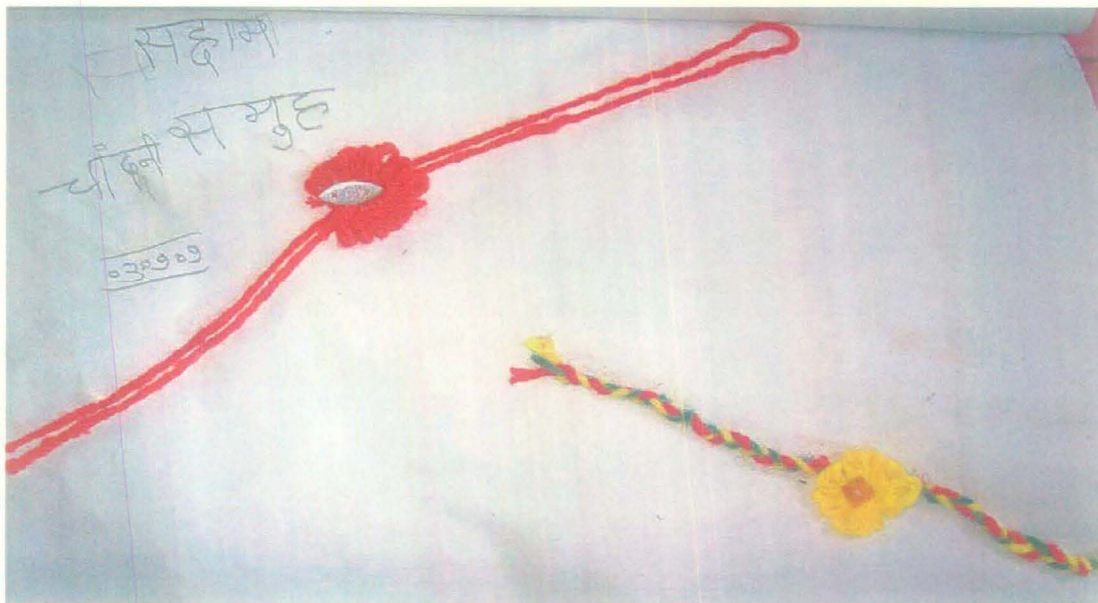
Picture 16: Id

Picture 17: Lines on local history of the village

हमारे गांव का इतिहास जयपुर की राज
थानी गांव-450 स 500 वर्ष पूराना
हमारे गांव में पहले खीती जाति के
लौग रहने लगे। सबसे पुराना पैड़
इमली 3 म। वर्ष पूराना मन्दिर-
200 सौ वर्ष पूरानी 15०-20०
वर्ष पूरान मन्दिर-150 वर्ष
गांव में जाद मीणा का मूहल
शिवजा का मन्दिर सबसे गजीन
स भा जाति के लौग गांव में
रहते हे सबसे गजीन कुआ-
150 वर्ष

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5. Kala (arts period): The arts class is the longest class in the entire time table. While all classes are for 40 minutes each, the art class which is scheduled at the end of the days work continues little more than an hour. (1.40 pm – 3.00 pm). The last few minutes of the class may be used to wrap the work and begin cleaning of the classroom before the school gets over.

Various activities are included in the arts class. The activities include drawing; dancing; writing stories and poems; doing plays based on some stories read in the class, paper folding (ORIGAMI) carpentry and making clay models. Often the issues discussed in the class on "*paryavaran*" or stories/chapters done during Hindi or English class become the basis for organising the art class. For instance on the day students discussed the gender role, they were asked to draw a picture of a member of their family performing a job/chore that he or she routinely performs. The work done in the arts class is put up on the class display boards the same day or early next day. The boards therefore are changed often. Besides putting the paper craft work or drawings on class display boards, the drawings and writings may also be included the students' magazine "*Baatuni*", which is published by Digantar. The charts and models prepared by the students are also displayed during the school exhibition.

Several 'kala' classes were observed during the field study and a brief description of two of the classes is given below.

In one arts class the teacher taught the students to make a bird by paper-folding. The teacher demonstrated and then children followed by making a bird of a similar kind and filling it with colours. The students shared and fought with each other over colours but soon rushed to their friends to show their progress. One of the students after having completed his work went to put up his work on the display board though the students were required to wait till more students had completed the work. Despite teacher's request, he went to put up his work. Another student came to the researcher and offered to teach how to make the bird. After demonstrating, he waited for the researcher to make it and then asked that the bird be coloured and that she put her name on the bird as everyone else in their class had done. He promised to include that bird in the display board. The day ended with students fulfilling their cleaning duties.

In another arts class with senior students in *hans samuh* (class for older students), the art class saw children being asked to write poems. Each student was given a different topic by the teacher in consultation with students. One of the students remarked that it was an arts class and that they should be drawing. The statement was followed by a small discussion between the teacher and students regarding what constituted arts. Students who were unable to write the poem offered to write a story instead. The students who faced problem while writing in terms of not being able to think of right content, the teacher advised them to think about their family members, what they do and see if they could write a poem on people they knew.

Discussion on concepts usually gets restricted to what we term as 'academic' concepts. The pedagogy and practices of Digantar reject the rigidity of such a notion. Learning processes included communicating and gaining information by way of charts, models, collage and crafts. In fact, handwork is an important component of the Digantar curriculum. This serves the role of a ladder to the development of the essential skills in children. But here children are not taught stitching to make them tailors or pottery to make them potters. Children are independent to learn such skills as per their own interest. Handwork also encourages the creativity and aesthetic sense of children. Another aspect of this is that it promotes the cooperation among children and a sense of collectivism in the process of their learning.

Picture 18: Clay modelling

Picture 19: Wood craft

Picture 20: Origami

Picture 21:Craft using materials like 'rice', 'bangles', 'jute threads' etc.

4.4 General classroom observations and common features in the subject classes

1. <u>Calling teacher by name</u>: The students called their teachers by name and did not address them as 'sir' or 'madam'. The female teachers were addressed by their name followed by *didi* (elder sister), e.g., *"Taranum didi'*. Male teachers were called by their first name followed *'ji'*, e.g., *"Jitendre ji"*. The teachers explained that this practice was followed in order to break the conventional relation of authority and submission and replace it with one of camaraderie, trust and intimacy.

2. <u>Participatory learning</u>: Children were active participants in the learning process. The teaching methodology involved regular inputs by students rather than a dialectic approach where the flow of information between teacher and student was unidirectional. While teaching a concept the children were asked to build on each others' ideas or bring examples from their context to relate to the concept being taught. This method allows making use of the rich experience that a child brings to the class. For instance, in a Hindi class, the meanings of difficult words were not simply given to the students to learn,

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instead after asking students to infer the meaning from the context, they were asked to construct sentences whereby they could locate the word in their experiential world. The fact that meanings are not simply given but students asked to think about the word, give their guesses forms a participatory learning environment.

3. Importance of exploration of nearby physical surroundings: Exploration of physical and familial surroundings was seen as a frequently used way of introducing new concepts where possible. Among the subjects, this method was found to be more frequently used for teaching of '*pariyavaran*' (environmental studies). Concepts such as 'living and non living'; 'gender roles'; 'types of birds' etc. were introduced using this method.

    For instance, in a class where the teacher was to begin a lesson on types of birds, he first went out with students some distance behind the school where there were trees and open partially barren landscapes. The students looked out for the different kinds of birds that they could spot. They drew the birds, wrote what they thought the birds were doing, and after having spent considerable time observing them came back to the class to discuss them. the process ensured that 'birds' were no longer academic concepts.

4. Introduction of new concepts by way of activities: various activities are used to introduce students to new concepts. The activities include handling the material, observing (going outside the class to watch birds, look for different kinds of leaves), learning to use them in a logical/productive/ creative manner (arranging stones in piles or shapes or any other kind of grouping); encouraging initiatives by ensuring active participation by students, creating space for co-operative learning where activities involve students working jointly in groups towards one aim. The role of activities is also important in understanding directions, focusing attention, being comfortable with the potential learning materials.

5. Story formation: this exercise is used to form a context in which could be used to understand a word/concept. For instance, In the Hindi class, children were given eight new words, told their meaning and asked to form a short story using those eight words. Once the students had formed their stories, the use of each word in the story was

discussed to enhance the understanding of is meaning. This exercise was important not only in the better understanding of the word's meaning but it also helped them learn, in the process, the grammar involved in framing sentences and the pragmatic use of words in order to communicate.

6. Drawings: also served as an important tool to facilitate learning various concepts. Rather than solely relying on illustrations given in various alphabet books, the students are encouraged to draw the new words, characters, names of objects, that they learn irrespective of how easy or difficult it is to draw the object. Researches in cognitive psychology reveal that strength of associations formed between the concepts in the human brain is stronger when the concepts are coded both verbally and non verbal codes (images) than when they coded by either of the two. Also, since the children draw themselves, the association between the word and the image is stronger as the time taken to draw helps them engage with the word for a longer duration.

7. Usage of local language in classroom: The languages spoken at home of the students studying in the Ratwali branch of Digantar were 'Nagori', 'Marwari' and 'Mewati'[10]. The most commonly spoken language is 'Dhundari'. While the text books are written in Hindi and Hindi is also the first language, the mother tongue is often used as a medium of classroom interactions. Though Hindi is used to explain concepts and discuss them in the class, students are allowed to express themselves in their local language when needed. Teachers also are encouraged to learn the language so that they can understand the children when the latter speak in their language. Referring to the language spoken at children's homes, a teacher expressed that since the most teachers were from Rajasthan, it was not too difficult for them to understand the child and moreover they did pick up the language during the stay in Digantar. The teacher while sharing his views emphasised that because the teachers were close to children, they were successful in understanding

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[10] The variations in language in a small village are a product of the migration of people within Rajasthan owing to climatic conditions like drought and search for better income sources.

the children (*adhiktar teacher kyunki Rajasthan mein rehte hain to rajasthani kahin kahin thoda thoda...joode hue rehte hai to adhiktar teacher samajh jaate hain bache jo bolte hain usko*).

During classroom observations it was noted that students often switched to their language especially in classes where creative verbal expression was required. In the morning *sabha*, one day was allotted for story telling and sharing riddles and jokes. More than in subject classes, they switch of language was observed during these sessions. In one of the observed '*sabha*' session (date), the theme of the *sabha* was story telling. One student started narrating a story in Hindi and after a couple of sentences switched to the local language. The teacher paid attention to the student and did not interrupt to either ask her to switch over to Hindi or to make corrections while speaking. In instances such as these, the teachers would later attempt to bring up the words which the student used and who's Hindi the student did not know. The underlying belief was that if the student was stopped while speaking irrespective of the language, he or she may not feel confident about sharing his / her experiences or doubts the next time. The teachers also use local language to explain concepts if they feel that a student is facing difficulty in understanding.

8. <u>Importance given to 'collective efforts'</u> : A number of activities done in the classroom are done in groups, be it staging plays, exploring the surroundings or even working out maths problems. Students are encouraged to help one another with doubts. Whenever the subgroups are formed in a class, the teacher often mentions that students working in a group help each other. For instance, in one of the Hindi classes, after making children sit in subgroups, the teacher instructed- "".*ab aap sab groups banaake bethoge. Ek group ke bache aamne –saamne bhethnge aur milke kaam karenge. Aapko ek doosre ki madat karni hai. Unka kaam dekhna hai aur jab padhenge to unhe sun na hai. Main ek ek karke sab ke paas aaoongi.* (Now all of you will sit in groups. Students of each group will sit face to face and work together. You have to help each other. See each others' work and listen to them when they read. I will come to each of you one by one). Several charts which have been put up in classes and on school boards carry the name of several children highlighting that the work is done collectively.

**Part V: Other school activities and practices**

The context of the child in the school goes beyond his/her classroom and books. There are various other school practices which influence a child's experience of the school and his experience of himself in the school.

1. Cleaning: the days starts at 9 pm with students and teachers together cleaning the school premises. It is preceded by the teachers, who reach 15 minutes prior to the beginning of the school, helping the children cross the road. During the cleaning time, the students and teachers sweep the classrooms; arrange the footwear neatly outside each classroom, fill water in the pots kept in each class, spread the carpet on the class floor, write the daily news on the school board; any on teacher writes the thought of the day on the other board. The toilets and the school premises are also cleaned by the students and teachers and together. The teachers reasoned that this exercise besides emphasising the importance of cleanliness and hygiene was also intended to inculcate in children respect for all kind of work and labour.

2. News board /thought of the day: There are two blackboards placed outside the '*samuh's* for writing daily news and the thought of the day. The students take turns to write the news on the board every morning. They select 6-7 headlines to be written on the board. News headlines from Rajasthan are written first followed by headlines on national news

    The thought of the day is written by teachers. The thought centres on various inspiring themes such as importance of 'hard work', 'courage', 'peace' etc.
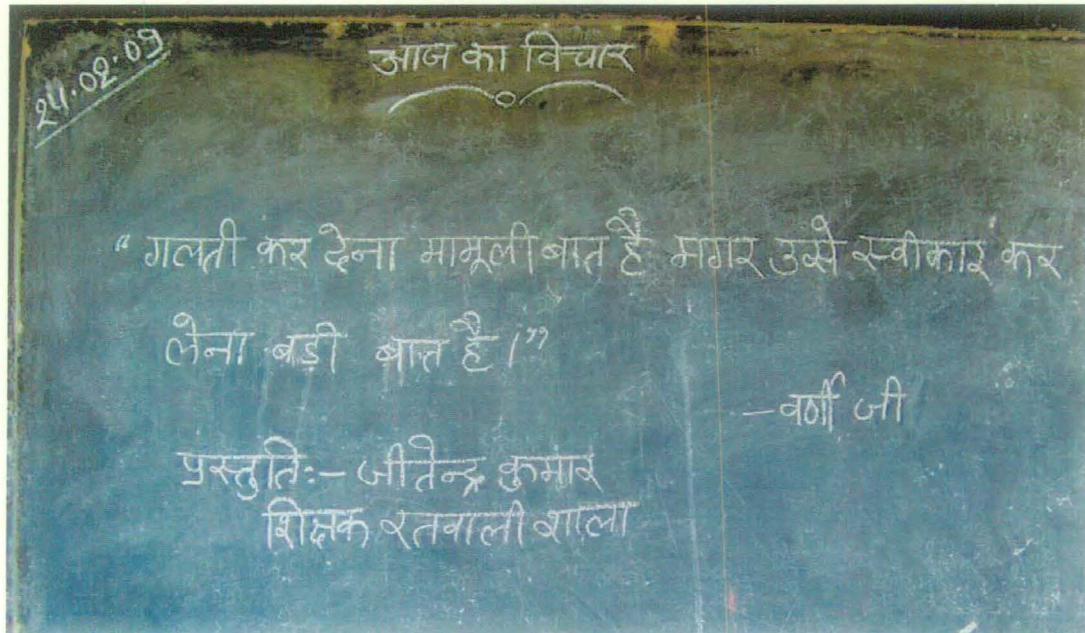
Picture22: Cleaning the school premises.
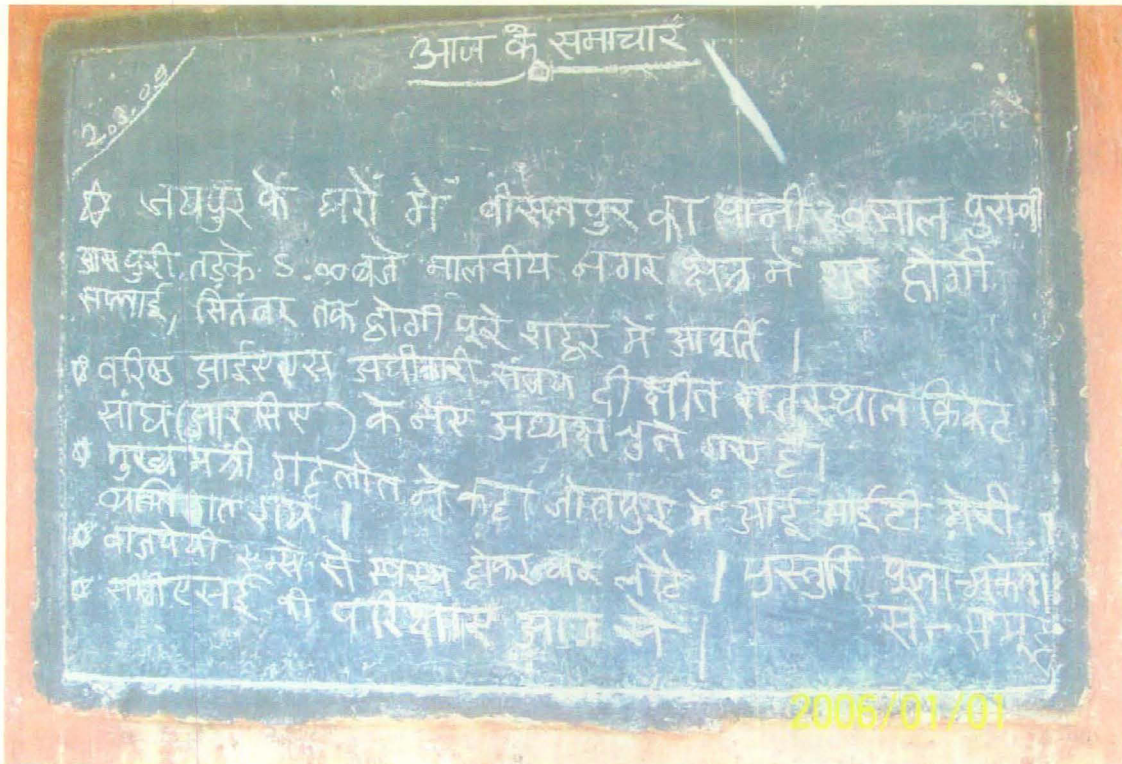

Picture 23: Cleaning the classroom

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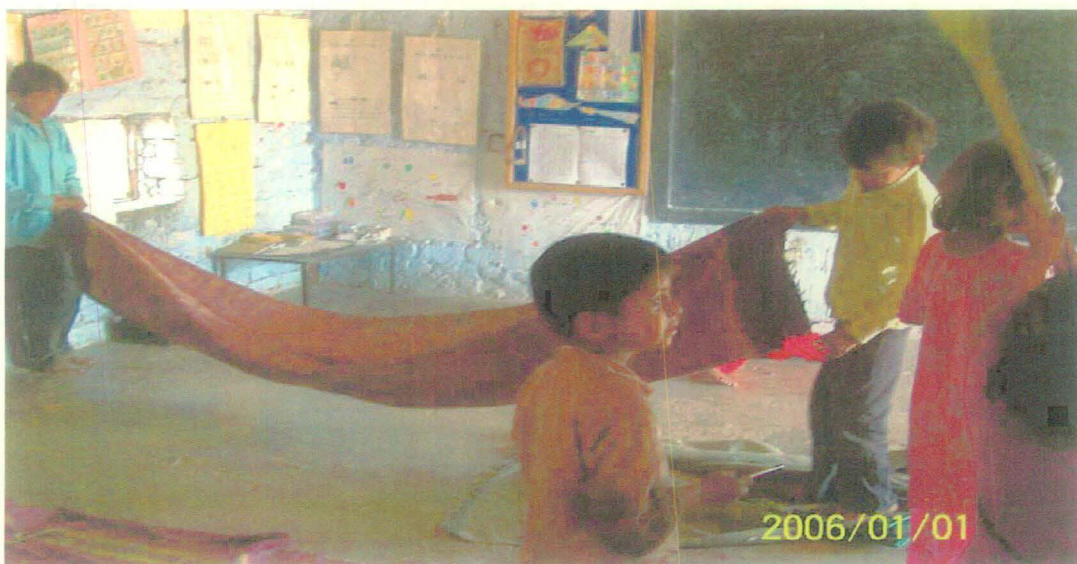
Picture 24: Thought of the day

Picture 25: News headlines

3. <u>Lunch break – observations</u>: the lunch break is from 12.10 pm to 1pm. Very few students choose to eat inside the class. The students carry the mats (*dari*) outside and form circles. Friendships can be seen between students belonging to different sections. A number of students in Digantar also have their siblings or cousins studying in the same group. These relations were however seen to be less determining of different lunch groups. Often the teachers joined the groups for lunch. The presence of the teacher was largely seen as being appreciated by the students. Teachers having lunch with the students may serve several functions:

i.   Strengthening of the bond between the teacher and the student: the sharing of food was helpful in breaking the traditional hierarchy between the teacher and the student where the teacher is seen as the centre of power. This also allowed the teachers and students an informal space to interact and know each other better. In addition, since the groups formed during lunch breaks were not strictly based on *samuh* based groupings, the teachers got an opportunity to interact with students of other *samuhs* and know them better. This was particularly useful if the students from other *samuhs* happened to be siblings of a student from their own *samuh* as it helped them understand the family context better and also during the regular community visits. If a few students stayed in the same neighbourhood, the same teachers could visit their homes irrespective of whether the child was from their *samuh* or their colleague's.

ii.   Enabling children overcome religional One of the teachers expressed that this could also help in bridging various differences in the student groups. In an interview with one of the school teachers, the teacher expressed that initially when the caste and religious differences were more marked between the students and influenced the student groupings, the teachers used the informal setting provided by the lunch break period to get the different groups to break ice. In a interview with a teacher he talked about how eating lunch with students helped in breaking the ice between different groups- religious and case based. *"pehle kehte the ki brahmno ke matka tha..jidhar unke bache jaate , kyunki. Log tanki sa paani pite the, brahmano ke bache nahi pite the. To shikshakon ko laga ki yeh to gadbad cheez hai, paani nahi pe rahe, theek*

karte hain. To shikshak khud sabhi se baat karte, saath bhet ke khaate, kabhi in bachon ke saath bhet ke khaana kha liya, kabhi un bachon ke saath bhet ke khaana kha liya, phir kabhi-"chalo bada group banaa ke saath bhet kar khaana khaate hain", to phir unko laga ki shikshak jo Brahman hai, yeh inke saath bhi khaana kha raha hai, to iska matlab isko to kuch nahi ho raha hai. To yeh cheez tab aati jab shikshak khud us cheez ko andar jaane ... to Theek hai sab ek saath milke khaana kha rahein hain, baant rahein hain (...earlier was said that (it) was Brahmins' pot where their children. Other people drank the water from tank where the Brahmin children did not drink. So the teachers felt that it was wrong that (they) were not drinking water and should correct it. So teachers themselves would talk to everybody, sit with them and eat, sometimes (we) sat with this group and ate, sometimes we sat with that group and ate and sometimes, "let us make a bigger group and sit together and eat. So they felt that the teacher who was Brahmin was sitting and eating with them and eating and nothing was happening to him. So this thing comes when the teacher him/herself knows it from inside... so it is fine that everyone is sitting together and eating and sharing it.)

During the lunch hour students played various games among themselves in the school premises. It was observed that the gender composition varied with the games played. Only girls were seen playing with the playing rope. Marbles were mostly played by the walls whereas the local versions of games like cricket were played by both together.

4. Teachers planning programme: At 3pm the school ends for the students, however the teachers are required to stay back till 5pm for preparing a daily report and the lesson plan for the following day. The report and the plan are prepared for each student and not for the class as a whole. The teachers share their observation and these reports with each there and a more in depth analysis is held on Saturday. The focus on child reflects a child-centric pedagogy where each child is treated and appreciated as an individual in the process of learning and is also the focus of this process. The teachers stated that since students of differing conceptual understanding were there in a single class and the school

philosophy emphasised that each student be allowed to learn at his/her own pace, such an 'individualised' report was necessary.

Picture 26: Teachers' daily report on work done by the students

नाम	तारीख ०२.०३.०९	तारीख ०३.०३.०९	तारीख ०४.०३.०९	तारीख ०५.०३.०९
शब्बीर	(A)	शि	इसाफ अवधारणा पर काम करते हुए प्रश्न 1 व 2 के उत्तर लिखे ।	"इसाफ" अवधारणा पर काम करते हुए प्रश्न 3 से 5 के उत्तर किए ।
मुकेश	कहुकहे अवधारणा पर कार्य करते हुए सभी अभ्यास प्रश्नों के उत्तर लिखे।	द्र कु	कम कहकहे अवधारणा 2री पढ़ी	"यह लेसा साहा" 2री पढ़ी व अभ्यास प्रश्न 1 का उत्तर किया ।
प्रेरना	(A)	अ	त	आजब बांसुरी अवधारणा पर काम करते हुए प्रश्न 5 का उत्तर
रमाना	अजब बांसुरी अवधारणा पर काम करते हुए सभी प्रश्नों के उत्तर लिखे।	व	खन्नारको अवधारणा पर काम करते हुए पेज 4 पढ़ा ।	"अनारको" अवधारणी पर काम करते हुए पेज 4 और अजब बांसुरी
मुस्ताकिम	अनोखे कपड़े अवधारणा पर काम करते हुए अभ्यास प्रश्न 1 का उत्तर भी लिखा ।	श्र	शेर बोला म्याऊँ अवधारणा पढ़ी ।	अनारको शेर बोला म्याऊँ अवधारणा पर काम करते हुए प्रश्न 1 व 2 के उत्तर लिखे
रबीना	वह तो मर गया हँसते-2 अवधारणा को से लेकर अंत पैराग्राफ तक पढ़ा	प	वह तो मर गया हँसते अव- धारणा पर काम करते हुए 1 से लेकर प्रश्न सं 5 तक के उत्तर लिखे ।	वह तो मर गया हँसते-2 अवधारणा पर काम करते हुए प्रश्न 6 से 9 तक लिखे
सना-II	(A)	र	वह तो मर गया हँसते हँसे अवधारणा पर काम करते हुए 1 प्रश्न हल किया । आतंभ राजण का चित्र बनाया	गया अवधारणा पढ़ी
आसिफ	वह तो मर गया हँसते-2 अवधारणा पूरी पढ़ी ।	र	वह तो मर गया हँसते -2 अवधारणा पर काम करते हुए प्र. सं. 1 का उत्तर देश	वह तो मर गया हँसते-2 अवधारणा पर काम करते हुए
सुल्ताना	वह तो मर गया हँसते-2 अवधारणा पर काम करते हुए अभ्यास के तथा रा के सभी प्रश्नों के उत्तर लिखे ।	हा/	वह तो मर गया हँसते अवधारणा पर काम करते हुए एक प्रश्न हल किया जिसमें रा तथा का चित्र बना	राधा अवधारणा पर काम करते हुए हो पढ़ा ।

2009/03/0

5. Bal panchayat: the school holds an annual 'bal panchayat' elections where 5 students are selected as the student representatives for the given academic session. The bal panchayat members meet every Saturday to discuss the students concerns and ways of addressing those concerns. The concerns may include students not full filling their everyday duties, coming late to school or fighting. The election process starts with students and teachers meeting to select the candidates. From each 'samuh' 4 students are nominated. After the nomination process is over, the candidates are asked to select a group of their supporters who then help the candidates make campaign posters. A *panchayat* is constituted of two

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boys and three girls. The proceedings of the elections held on 27 February 2009 have been presented below:

- Once the nomination process was over, each candidate was provided with an election symbol. The candidates prepared the posters with help of the members of their support groups. They were also encouraged to come up with 'catchy slogans'. The teachers prepared the ballot boxes, election slips, rubber stamp and other necessary materials for the election process.

Picture 27: List of candidates and their election symbols.

- On the morning of the Election Day a combined school *sabha* was held where the candidate were asked to formally introduce themselves to the students and speak about what they would do if elected. The various promises made by students during the course of observations included:

"main bachon ke beech mein hone waali ladaiyon ko rokne ki koshish karoongi aur *jo bachche late aate hain unhe late aane se rokuungi"* ((I will try to stop the fights between students and students who came late, I will stop them from coming late)

main school mein pankhe lagvaoongi[11] (I will get fans installed in the school).

main school mein hand pump theek karvaaongi[12] (I will get the hand pump in school repaired).

While the last two promises might not have been in control of the student representatives, the fact of their being promised may be seen as a reflection of the felt need for the same. Some students also expressed that if they all ask for the above mentioned demands they may be paid attention to.

- After the students had presented their agenda they were given 2 hours to campaign. During this time the students could put up more posters, talk to other students and request them for voting in their favour. They were also provided with '*dhol*' (drum) to accompany the active sloganeering. This was followed by the voting.

Picture 28: Campaign posters

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[11] During the rsearcher's stay in Digantar it was also noticed that though the temperatures had started to rise (month of March), the school did not have fans. The need for the same was also expressed by the teachers and the parents who said that the girls faced the maximum difficulty since the boys

[12] During the researcher's stay in Digantar the hand pump in the school was found to non-functional, which had been functional in a earlier visit.

Picture 29: Campaigning by candidates

- For the purpose of voting, the members of the outgoing Panchayat were assigned various responsibilities which included checking the name of students who came to vote in the voters list, to apply ink on the voter's finger, to give the ballot slip and explain the procedure to put the stamp next to the desired candidate. Students were also handed responsibilities like controlling the crowd outside the voting room taking charge of the first-aid box in case of any 'medical emergency'. Each student entered the room. First his/her name was tallied with the voters list, the ink was then applied on the student's left index finger, the student was then provided the ballot slip with instructions regarding how to vote and also how to then fold the ballot papers and drop it in the ballot boxes. The teachers also cast their votes. Each student was asked to vote for two students- a boy and a girl.

- The voting was followed by counting where the teachers and the members of the outgoing *panchayat* counted the votes. The votes for male and female candidates were

counted separately. On the basis of the counting 2 boys and 3 girls were elected. The counting was followed by a school meeting where the results were declared. While declaring the results the teacher emphasised that each student had received some votes which implied that there was no student whom other students did not trust or disliked. Post elections, the five elected students had a meeting to select the head of the committee which as a ritual was usually the eldest member of the group or a member who had been re-elected and thereby more experienced.

The conduction of elections in the school is in line with the philosophy of Digantar of instilling democratic and egalitarian values in children. The teachers also shared that in the village where the Ratwali branch of Digantar had had a very low voter turnout during elections. The election process in the school was marked by great enthusiasm which the teachers hoped inspire them to push their parents to go out and vote. This process reflects the attempt of the school to address pertinent issues without direct intervention but by the creating understanding and awareness in the student.

Picture 30: A student applying ink on the voter's finger.

Picture 31: A student casting his vote.

6. School magazine (*Baatooni*): The school structure of Digantar allows an 'expressive space' to the child where he could satisfy his/her desire to be creative and artistic. One of such spaces provided is the school magazine '*Batooni*' where publishes poems and stories written by the students. The illustrations in the book are also made by the student.

7. Exhibitions: Students of Digantar also get an opportunity to showcase there during the annual school exhibition. Most of the works are done with collective efforts of the students which can be seen with names of several children put together in one model or chart paper. The emphasis on 'collective' can be seen. Students' everyday class work like essays, drawings and other writing works are also compiled in different folders and put for visitors to see.

When one branch of Digantar holds an exhibition, students and teachers from other Digantar schools are also invited to the exhibition. The drawings and crafts exhibited are made jointly by the students and teachers. The visitors are also requested to give their feedback and suggestions.

8. Community visits: Community visits by the teachers are an important feature of Digantar schools. There are 90 students in the Ratwali branch of Digantar and the teachers are required to visit each student's home at least once a month. The students in Digantar live in areas near the school. Also, a number of students come from joint families' therefore more than one student comes from the same family. For instance, in 'Chandni samuh', there were two cousins from the same joint family. Each of them also had siblings in other sections. This enables the teachers to meet more parents and visit more than one home in a single visit. The teachers may also divide the areas between themselves with each teacher covering all the homes in a given area. In Digantar each teacher knows all the students in the school and therefore it may not be necessary that only the class teacher visits a student's home. Besides these regular visits, the teachers also partake in local festivals and functions.

The key features of these visits are:

i.   The visits are viewed by the school as well as the community members as helping in establishing a relationship of mutual trust and concern between the school and the community.

ii. Teachers are expected to gracefully accept the hospitality offered by the family and not let religious or any other socio-cultural prejudices affect the interaction. For instance, if the family offers food or tea, the teachers are encouraged to accept and share the same. However, this may not be confused with teachers expecting or accepting 'favours' from the students. No teacher is allowed to ask students for favours such as asking the student to bring something from home for them.

iii. It is taken care that the purpose of the visit may not always be to discuss the child's academic progress. One of the teacher explained, *"humaare ghar jaane ka maksad yeh nahin hai ki hum bachchon ki shikaayat karein. Nahin to bachche bhi nahin chaahenge ki hum waahan jaayein. Humaare jaane ka maksad unhe daraana nahi hain. Bas unse milne, baat karne jaate hain. Parivaar se milte hain, haal chaal poochte hain"* (the purpose of our going is home not to complain about the children. Otherwise the children

will also not want that we go there. The purpose of our going there is not to scare them. (We) just go there to meet them, talk to them. Meet their family and ask about their wellbeing).

iv. The visits are not confined to discussing a child's progress in the class. The teacher may also pay visit in case of student or even his/her family member being ill.

v. The visits serve the purpose of familiarising the teachers with the context of the student. During their visits the teachers inquire about the non-school goer members of the family and the extended family. They remain informed about the occupational and educational status of each member and also of recent any particular events that may have happened in the family e.g., any sickness in the family, loss of job of any family member, engagement in the family etc.

vi. During the community visits the teachers also try to follow up with the educational progress of the students who had completed their upper primary from Digantar. The fact that most of the students who had passed out of Ratwali have siblings who are still in Digantar makes the follow up easier for the teachers.

vii. Using local language to communicate with parents: while none of the teachers in Ratwali belonged to the village in which the school was located, they understood the local language and were able to converse in it comfortably.

viii. Another purpose of the visits is to join in the community during their festivals and functions.

Once a month a community- school meeting is organised in the evening when the teachers and parents meet in the school premises in the evening to discuss their concerns and feedback.

Part VI: Interactions with the teachers

The interviews and discussions were carried out with teachers teaching the 'Ratwali shala' and the 3 academic co-ordinators who coordinated and oversaw the working of all the Digantar branches. The interactions with teachers took the form of semi-structured interviews and also informal conversations during lunch or class hours. Teachers' perception of the role of education in a child's life, their understanding of the local context and culture, the perception of their own role as a teacher, and their understanding of Digantar philosophy were some of the themes that were sought to be explored. In the formal interview sessions while the pre-decided themes were discussed, each teacher also focused on certain particular issues in more details than others. The interviews and discussions yielded several school related information such as admission and reshuffling procedures, evaluation system, teaching methodology and also on pedagogic issues and personal experience of teachers.

1. Importance given to each child and respecting their speed of learning: the school follows a multi grade system or in the founder's words an 'ungraded system'. The teachers expressed that they paid individual attention to each child's pace of learning and conceptual understanding. A teacher said that unless they followed each child's learning graph themselves they will not be able to form groups or plan the programmes.

2. Focus on developing child's self learning capacity: the teachers were unanimous in their opinion that the teaching methodology be such that students can become more self-dependent over time. While they acknowledged the use of workbooks as one way where each child worked at his/her own pace and attempted to work by him/herself, they also discussed various ways whereby they tried to help child build his/her own capacities over time. One way that was found useful was making children work in groups and learn from each other. In one of the classes, a teacher asked the students to arrange themselves in groups and went from group to another without being able to sit with all the children at least once. Since the duration of class was only 40 minutes and there were 30 students in the class, there was a concern that 'focus on each child' could remain merely in spirit without being practiced in classroom teaching. The teacher explained that 'focus on each child' did not mean 'spoon feeding' each child rather the purpose was to enhance the

ability of each student. "*zaroori nahin hai ki teacher ek his class mein har bache ke paas bethe. Humein yeh bhi dekhnaa hai ki wo khud se ya ek doosre ki madat se kitna kaam kar sakte. Humaara maksad unhe hum par nirbhar karnaa nahin hai. Haan agar bacha aaye aur kahe use madat chahiye to teacher zaroor uske saath bethegi*" (not necessary that teacher sits with each child in the class. We also have to see that how much they can do by themselves and the help of each other. Our purpose is not to make them dependent on us. Yes, if a child comes and says that he/she needs help, the teacher will definitely sit with him/her).

Teachers also stressed on the role of group work in helping to build capacity. "*Jab bache ek doosre ki madat karte hain, to khud bhi seekhte hain. Unhe yeh jaan ne ka mauka milta hai ki wo kitna seekh chuke hain. Saath mein kaam karne se veh apni kshamta bhi bhada sakte hain.* "(when children help each other, they also learn themselves. They get an opportunity to see how much they have learnt from each other. By working together they can build their own abilities). The explanations given by teachers also reflected their understanding of Digantar Philosophy and their own efforts to bring it in their teaching.

3. <u>Need based and Flexible evaluation system</u>: the Evaluation system in Digantar is not for the purpose of certification or screening. Since the system is a multigrade one, the evaluation is not for the purpose of deciding whether a child needs to be promoted or not. Emphasising the importance of such a need based process, a teacher explained that there may be an instance where a child has taken help or just copied a work without understanding and therefore looking at class work/work done by itself is not a sufficient parameter for judgement. A teacher explained that whenever a teacher has a doubt regarding a child or children's understanding of a particular concept, they would prepare a '*prashna patra*' (question paper) that tested the understanding. They would tell the students that there is a worksheet that needs to be done as a part of the class work on that day and they should write what they know and can leave what they do not ("*jo aaye wo likh do baaki chod dena*"). The exercise is not given name of test or exam. A child may be given a story to be read in the class and follow it by a worksheet based on the story. The child's performance would help the teacher know about the level of understanding

the child has reached. Another teacher reminded the researcher that their every day planning diary where they recorded what work each child had done during the day did not only serve as an important way of evaluation but also a more reliable one because if its regularity. In a multi grade system where children working at different conceptual levels were in the same class, everyday individual evaluation was necessary for work to be carried on to the next day. In such a classroom a teacher could not afford to assume the level of understanding.

4. <u>Familiarity with each child's context</u>: the teachers were well versed with the everyday context of each child along with their academic progress. This was evident when they talked about individual students. It could be seen that they were aware of the family condition of each child and were sensitive to it. They knew about each child's siblings, their parental occupations and any major happening at home. Some teachers said that knowing this also helped them know they kind of educational support they had at home. However one of the most important reasons that were expressed was that it kept them aware of the existing conditions of the community and helps them define their place in it.

In one of the morning 'sabhas', a teacher called the students and inquired which '*madrassas*' they all went to and what they learnt there. A list was subsequently made. Later during interacting with the teachers it was found that some students were finding to it difficult to maintain the balance between the two in terms of work and also there were instances of time clash between the two. The teacher said that they would themselves go and meet the *madrassa* teachers and request them to take classes after the regular schools gets over so that the students do not have to make a choice or leave any of the two.

5. <u>Relation between school and community</u>: the teachers expressed complete agreement to the Digantar's Philosophy of considering the community as an important participant in the educational process. Just as by calling...

6. <u>Sensitivity to the various community activities/processes to minimize any conflict between the school and community</u>: defining the place of a school in a community a

teacher said, *"haemin nahi bhoolna chahiye ki school society ka hissa hai, society school ka hissa nahin"*(we should not forget that school is a part of the society, society is not a part of the school). He added that it was important for the teachers to understand this so that they do not disturb a larger social structure to an extent that the school becomes a misfit in the community or the community begins to view it suspiciously. Education was what the school was required to provide and it had to be provided in a way that even as it made the child an independent learner, a confident and a critical thinker, it remained sensitive to the community beliefs and responsive to its needs. The teachers felt that sensitivity to the various community activities/processes was important to minimize any conflict between the school and community and considering that at stake was education of girls from a minority group, such a conflict could act as a deterrent.

7. For instance, Digantar has paid a lot of attention to girls' education. However even as it tries to work with the community, inspire confidence and thereby influence, the teachers say that they have been careful that community does not feel that we are trying to interfere too much in their daily lives. A teacher explained by narrating an incident- *"ek incident bataata hoon. Ek ladki thi hamaare school mein. Wo thodi pareshaan reh rahi thi, to puchne par kaha ki uski shaadi ki baat chal rahi aur phir padhne nahi denge. To usse samajh nahi aa raha tha ki kaise kya kare... aise ghar ke maamle bachon ko tark dein, jisse ve apni baat keh sakein, samjha sakein. Ek dum sab kuch nahi badalne ki koshish karte. Hum yeh nahi kahenge parivaar ko ki aap galat hain, par yeh kahenge ki sarkar 18 saal se kam umar mein shaadi nahi sweekaar karti to jab 18 saal tak intezaar karna hi hai, to tab tak padhai jaari rakhiye. Weh is tark ko zyaada samjhte hain, iske bajaaye ki aap galat hain, aap padhaai kaise chudvaa sakte hain ityaadi.* (one incident I will tell you, there was a girl in our school,

He then added, *Hum ek larger context mein kaam karte hain, aur yeh bhoolna nahi chahiye. Change ek dum nahi aati. Aur aisa nahin ki zaroorat padne par hum unhe chod denge. Agar zaroorat ho tab ladki ke ghar jaakar baat karenge par koshis hogi ki humdirectly interfere na karein aur ladki khud unhe achi tarah tarak de ke samjhaa sake"* (we work in a larger context and this should not be forgotten. Change does not

happen immediately. Its not like if there is a need we will leave them [students]. If there is need we will go to the girl's house and talk but our effort will be to not interfere directly and the girl herself exlain them nicely using logic).

One of the academic coordinators also said that one way of showing insensitivity would be to disregard their hospitality when we visit them. We can not let our prejudices show. He explained that if a Brahmin teacher goes to the village and refuses to accept any eatable or drink that the community which is majorly Muslim offers him, the commnity people will immediately sense the prejudice. Tecahers tecahing in Digantar, according to him must be willing to overcome their prejudices and discriminations and this is also an important component of the teacher training progarmme.

8. The importance of teacher training workshops and programmes: The teacher training for Digantar covers a whole expanse. It covers pedagogical understandings, teaching methodology, and subject specific knowledge and teaching skills. Teachers when they first came to Digantar admitted that the schools they had previously taught in had different understanding of the children as well as the goal of teaching. One teacher said, *"bachon par itnaa dhyaan dena, unko is tarah samjhnaa, yeh sab kahan hota hai. yahan bache humme teacher ke roop mein nahi dekhte, apna hak samjhte hain. Yahan par bachon par zor nahi daalte. Bachon ko sikhane mein yahan mazaa aata hai."*

Since each teacher was required to take all subject classes, this required that they receive training regularly. The importance of subject specific workshops was emphasized by all the teachers. The 'kala' classes where children did clay modelling, paper folding, drawings also required teachers help and often initiatives. The teachers said that they were given workshops for craft and drawing skills as well.

Besides teaching pedagogy and subject specific knowledge and skills, teacher training is also required to help teachers realise the importance of building a relation with the community and to cast of their prejudices when interacting with the students coming from diverse backgrounds. Emphasising the importance

9. <u>Influence of Digantar Philosophy on the teachers' perception of teaching</u>: reflecting on the changes that teaching in Digantar had brought to her understanding of teaching, a teacher said, "*yahan aane se pehle thoda drishtikon alag tha, par yahan pe aakar dekhne ko mila ki agar hum padhaane ke tarikon mein thoda sa antar laayein to bachchon ko padhne mein mazaa bhi aa sakta hai*" (Before coming here the viewpoint was different but coming here [I] saw that if we bring some change in the method of teaching then children can even enjoy reading). When asked what her viewpoint prior to coming here was she was replied that earlier for her teaching meant teaching the text in class and do the required activities as prescribed. Coming here she got exposed to how important could things like teacher-student relation or teacher community relation could be. Another teacher added, "*agar mein ab doosre school bhi jaaoon to jo yahanjis tarah padhnaa seekha hai use wahan bhi use karoongi. Bachon se jo pyaar milta hai, wo khushi se padhte hain, acha lagta hai. yeh sab to jahan bhi jaayein kar sakte hain apne star par*" (even if I go to another school now then how I have learnt to teach here, will do there also. The love [we] get from students, they learn with joy, feels good. This we can try at our level wherever we go).

Some teachers admitted that initially they had apprehensions about the freedom given to the children but over the time they realized that freedom by itself was not a problem. If learning could be made interesting and school a warm and an enjoyable place, then children would not want use the freedom to escape from the learning places. The teachers felt that this was one important fact they had learnt at Digantar. Some teachers said that they had in the beginning also been awkward about children calling them by names, but they added that in course of time realizing the bonding that had developed between them and the students, they had begun to like it. A teacher expressed it saying, "*kaun kehta hai madam ya sir bolne se hi respect hoti hai. yahan par bache humein dil se chahte hain. Naam se bulaate hain par 'ji' aur 'didi' lagaa kar bolte hain aur sabse bada ki dil se, apna hak samajh kar bulaate hain. Saath bheth kar hum sab khaate hain.*" (who says that only by calling sir or madam only you respect. Here children like us from their hearts. They might call us by names but add 'ji' or didi- [elder sister] and more over they call us thinking they have a right over so. Sitting together we eat together).

The teachers agreed that coming to Digantar had helped them realise that education was than academics and that teaching was more than a one-way lecture process. They had learnt to value each child.

Part VII: Interactions with the community

The researcher visited the village in which the school was situated and met parents of some of the children studying in schools. In each of the visit, the researcher was accompanied by one or more teachers who introduced her to the community and also facilitated interaction by providing inputs and also translating when required. The interaction between the teachers and parents also provided glimpses of the nature of relation between the two. The community interaction was more by way of group discussions and interviews with individual members of the community. With the members often spread around in the physical space it was not possible to completely record the conversations however the conversation was recorded to the maximum extent on the paper and all the emerging points carefully noted.

<u>Observations</u>

The content as well as nature of interaction between the teachers, parents and children provided openings to be able to look at the dynamics and perceptions that lie beneath. The key observations during these interviews were:

1. In most homes there were more than two generations that lived together and the female members of the family were more involved with their children's education irrespective of their own educational level.

2. In most homes more than one child was or had been in Digantar at some point. This

3. After passing out from Ratwali, most students joined the government school that was within 2km radius.

The interactions with community touched upon various aspects of school community relationship and the perception the parents had about the role of education in their children's life. The conversations began with casual conversations intended to build a comfort and rapport

between the researcher and the members of the community. While the effort to keep the natural flow of conversation was made, the themes based on the research questions and objectives were also used to guide the conversation. The themes however were not imposed on the conversation and the other emerging themes were allowed to come up. The medium of interaction was Hindi. However there were some local words that were not understood by the researcher. The community members too needed help with understanding some Hindi words. The accompanying teacher helped with translations.

1. <u>Nature of parental involvement in education</u>: the parental involvement in education was more in terms of keeping regular contact with the teachers in order to follow the progress of their child. Most of the parents felt that they could not offer academic help to their children owing to their own illiteracy. However they did not see it as a problem since children were not given homework and tests. A mother in response to a question on the nature of their involvement replied, "*ghar ke liye kaam nahi dete, to inhe zaroorat nahi padti. School mein hi kara dete hain. Bacjon ko roz basta uthaane ka bhi jhanjat nahin. To hum khush hain.* (they don't give work for home. Get it done in school itself. Children don't even have to carry school bags. So we are happy.)

   The mothers were seen as more aware of the everyday academic progress of the child than the fathers since they were the ones who interacted more with teachers by virtue of being at home when the visits were made.

2. <u>Perceived role of education in child's life</u>: regarding education, most parents had not thought of a long term plan. No parent responded in terms of professional goals. A response by a mother conveys this observation. "abhi aage kya sochna. Jab tak padh raha tab tak theek hai. Phir dekhenge. Yahan pea acha karega to phir jaaeyga aage." (why think now. Till he is studying it is fine. Then we'll see. If he does well here, he'll move ahead). Their expectations from education were more in lines of that the child would be more aware of his/her surroundings, will be able to deal with everyday business of money transactions, talking to others intelligently.

While the boys were sent to the government school without much hesitation, girls were sent only if there was more than one girl going to the same school. While the parents expressed their preference for sending their daughters to Bandhiyali branch of Digantar for medium and high school, the distance was a major deterrent.

3. Perceived role of education in a girl's life: Girls enrollment was found to have increased substantially after Digantar schools were established. The persuasion efforts by the teachers and the positive discrimination policy for girls during admission were some of the major reasons. The regular interactions with teachers had also helped in building parents' trust in the school. Regarding the role of education in a girl's life, there were several responses. When asked about the importance of education in a girl's life, the paternal grandmother of a girl replied that if the girl was not schooled, when she would get married, she would not be able to read her letters, write letters which would make her dependent on others She felt that a girl needed basic education to be able to take care of daily routine works like buying, bargaining, planning expenses etc. the grandmother expressed that she wanted her own daughter to go to school but the daughter would refuse in spite being scolded or beaten.

Another mother felt that, *"agar ladki padhegi nahin, to doosre ghar mein sab budhu samjhegnge. Wo izaat nahi hogi. Padhegi to bachon ko bhi padhaegi, log baat sunenge"*. (if she doesn't study, she would be considered a fool in the other house [in-laws]. That respect will not be there. If she studies, she'll teach her children also. People will listen to her). However, the parents were not willing to send their daughters to school if the school was far or if she was not good in studies unlike for a boy whom they were willing to send to distant schools for schooling purpose. Employment was not seen as a purpose of studying for girls. Most of the reasons were centered on better management of the house. Early marriage was still a problem in the village and in many instances the teachers had to go and convince parents about avoiding the same. Such instances however had decreased over the years.

4. Views on Digantar: established in 1978, Digantar had been in the area for 31 years now. In many families it was the second or the third generation that was going to school and

therefore there was a familiarity and acceptance of the school and its broader philosophy. The interaction with teachers and their involvement in the life of community had established a nature of trust. The parents expressed that they would want the school to be upgraded till middle or secondary level since the children enjoyed going to Digantar and felt less burdened.

Summary

The philosophy of Digantar was found to be reflected in the varied kind of data that emerged. The organisation of the classroom could be seen to provide individual space to each child and the seating arrangement confirmed the Digantar's philosophy of not seeing teacher as the sole authority. By way of the circular seating arrangement the teacher was made a co-participant in the process of knowledge formation or construction. The multi grade approach and the formation of subgroups allowed each child's progress to follow its own course without being rushed.

The textbooks and the various activities in the class were found to acknowledge the child's everyday experience and use it in the concept building. While the textbooks carried various references to the child's context, the classroom transactions also included aspects of the child's environment as useful resource material. Linkages could be seen between the texts as well as the classroom transactions of different subjects. The acknowledgment of the context was not only terms of using it as a base to build further understanding. The content and the method of learning also required the children to critically look at their own surroundings and practices and be able to question the same. The interaction between the classroom and the community was bi-directional.

The broader school practices also reflected philosophy of inclusion since children of all socio-cultural were not only accepted but efforts were made to help students overcome prejudices and biases. The regular interactions between the parents and the teachers had led to better link between the home and the school were none stood isolated.

Chapter 4

Discussion, Summary and Conclusion

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Discussion

The aim of the research endeavour was to reflect on the 'socio-cultural inclusive practices' of Digantar. The research was therefore guided by certain research questions and objectives that covered various domains of inclusion. The themes that emerged during the course of analysis of data and the results provide an insight to how the various pedagogic practices of Digantar address these objectives. In the following sections, the various themes that emerged have been discussed in light of the research objectives. The discussion has been divided into four parts with each part focussing on one objective.

Part I: Socio-cultural context in concept building

The first objective of the research was to study the ways in which the socio-cultural context of the child is included in the concept building and learning.

Pedagogic principle

The pedagogy of Digantar begins with the premise that 'child's learning be built on his existing experiences or already developed skills and there is a stated acknowledgment of the fact that the concepts and conceptual structures are formed on the basis of experience when one tries to organize the experience. This then becomes the guiding directive for the way the curriculum that also includes the texts and the methods is shaped.

The emphasis is on a child's existing experiences and skills reflect the underlying assumptions of child being an active constructor of knowledge and also of him/her being located in a context which makes experience possible. The context includes physical as well as social and both these contexts find their ways in the text and nature of activities developed by Digantar.

Socio-cultural context as the starting point in the text

Using the child's early experiences in his/her socio-cultural settings as the starting point for concept building was observed in each of the 3 subject texts that Digantar develops. The books either began with topics that were close to the child's immediate experience or use of materials that the child was most familiar with.

The first book in the series of books for 'Paryavaran' (environment) begins with an activity involving discussion on children's own homes and subsequently a discussion on things used while making home and things used at home. Gradually the scope environmental studies is extended beyond home to include topics on family, self, body parts and later more abstract concepts like 'living-non living', classification based on abstract concepts like shapes and measurements.

The book series in language development (Hindi) begins with an exercise where each child is required to talk about self. The nearness of the topic to the child's immediate experience ensures that in the first exercise involving communication, children do not have to begin with a concept that is new to them and therefore more difficult to articulate in a language that is not their mother tongue.

The book series for maths begins with a game using spoon and marble. The child is required to walk with a spoon in hand and a marble placed in it without dropping the marble. It is followed by another game involving collection of different kind of stones to make patterns. In both the exercises the materials used are familiar to children. Beginning the concept building with a game is also an effort on the part of the textbook developers to begin learning using a method with which children are most comfortable. The preface of the book also acknowledges the importance of games as activities that a child has developed fondness for before he comes to school. The relaxed informal setting that games allow in addition to providing opportunity for peer-group bonding can also be seen as being close to the child's everyday settings which are informal and more co-operative than competitive.

Including the socio-cultural in education however does not imply that education remains confined to what is 'everyday'. Concept building that begins with using the socio-cultural

context of the child as a starting point and as a tool, needs to be taken forward for developing higher and more complex levels of thinking. The acknowledgment of the same is reflected in Digantar texts which define a good resource material as that which is related to the child's context and has the potential to be developed further.

> *"samagri aisi ho jo, bache ki samajh (jo usne ab tak seekha hai aur jo kshamtaayein arjit ki hain) aur parivesh se judti hui, aage badhein"*- materials which the child understands [whatever he/she has learnt and the capabilities he/she has acquired till now] and are related to the contexts should be taken forward. (*shikshak pustak- bhasha vikaas shrinkhala-* Teacher's book- language development series)

The progress from 'everyday concepts' to 'scientific or more abstract concepts' requires certain kind of practices and processes. 'Spiralling' and the 'teacher-peer group mediation' were two such processes that were reflected in teaching-learning practices in Digantar. While the terms themselves are not used to describe the methods in the papers on pedagogic practices of Digantar, the practices involving the same can be seen in classrooms.

Spiralling:

The process of building higher abstract concepts does not always lie in searching for new resource material from the context or waiting for a simpler concept to be formed before progressing in a unidirectional order of increasing difficulty. While utilisation of socio-cultural resources is important, consistent dependence on them at all times may make movement from one abstract concept to another difficult in absence of such a material.

The process of revisiting old concepts and activities while forming new concepts or combining the learning of two or more concepts at a time can be seen in several workbooks that have been prepared for each subject especially in Math. For instance in '*Ganit Bodh-1*' counting and addition are developed simultaneously with each facilitating the development of the other. Introducing 'addition' at an early stage while counting is still being taught may be perceived as difficult. However a back and forth movement between the two where the concept of addition explains the number series and the knowing of numbers is necessary for addition creates a condition where the concept of higher abstraction does not remain unattainable within the

constrains posed by developmental stages. This kind of organisation in workbooks is reflective of the spiral curriculum proposed by Bruner (1960). According to Bruner (1960),

'A curriculum as it develops should revisit this basic ideas repeatedly, building upon them until the student has grasped the full formal apparatus that goes with them' (Bruner, 1960, p.13)

This method enables the child to better understand the links between the concepts and revise and rethink concepts during the process of revisiting ideas. A spiral curriculum has added advantages in classrooms where students absenteeism is high. When the concepts are separated from one another spatially in texts and temporally during teaching there is no possibility of revisiting old concepts or developing more linkages between them. Therefore a student who misses a couple of classes in a row would find it difficult to cope up on joining. The problem of absenteeism is high among children becoming to lower socio-economic groups. In absence of a spiral model the gaps created are difficult to fill leading to disinterest in studies since a child who has missed a few classes will not be able to follow what is taught next.

The role of teacher in creating readiness by scaffolding and mediating assumes much significance.

Peer group and teacher mediation:

The process of building further concepts on already acquired concepts, brings to the importance of methodology. If one goes by the Piagetian view of constructivism, a good material by itself is a potent tool for an active learner, however the emphasis that Digantar lays on teacher-training programme and collective efforts by students while doing their class work, point towards employing a more Vygotskian approach where the concept of 'joint- mediation' plays an important role. During interaction with teachers, most of them explained the importance of collective efforts in two ways- fostering a collective spirit and also learning and doing better with help of one another. The teacher's role was not merely 'instructional'. The classroom organisation where she moved from one student or group to another addressing their difficulties also reflect a more guiding and less didactical approach towards. Classroom learning allows the children opportunity to work independently, in co-operation with other students and also to benefit from the guidance provided by the teachers. They are provided with space to explore

their own potentials and to develop them with aid provided by the others. The concept of 'Zone of proximal Development' can be seen as having its influence in the teaching learning process. Vygotsky (1978) maintained that the child follows the adult's example and gradually develops the ability to do certain tasks without help or assistance. He called the difference between what a child can do with help and what he or she can do without guidance the 'zone of proximal development'. According to him,

> "the development of the scientific.. Concept, a phenomenon that occurs as apart of the educational, constitutes a unique form of systematic co-operation between the teacher and the child. The maturation of the child's higher mental functions occurs in this cooperative process, that is, it occurs through the adult's assistance and participation". (Vygotsky, 1978).

An excerpt from one of the Parayavaran below illustrates how building on child's existing experience and skills in a socially mediated setting can help in building abstract concepts from the everyday concepts.

> In another class on *Paryavaran*, the concept of *'sajeev- nirjeev'* (living and non-living) was to be introduced. Students were first asked to go out and name as many 'things' as they could find. They were given 20 minutes to do so. When the students came back, they were made to sit facing the blackboard. As they named all the objects they had seen, the teacher put the names on the blackboard. After this exercise was completed, the teacher drew a few columns on the board. He then named one of the several things and asked the students to describe (truck). The students gave the descriptions such as it has huge, it has tyres, it is a vehicle etc. He then named another object and asked students to describe. After some of the boards had been described, he asked them to think about the differences between a 'truck' and a 'bird'. The students discussed their features:

i.   *Bird khaana khaata hai, truck nahi khaata* (bird eats, truck does not eat)

ii. *Truck bada hota hai, chidiyaa hoti hai* (truck is big but the bird is small)

iii. *Bird udtaa hai, truck nahi udtaa* (bird flies but the truck does not)

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iv. *Chidiyaa khud udti hai, par truck khud nahi chalta. Truck ko driver chalaata hai.* (The bird flies on its own, the truck does not move on its own. Driver drives the truck.).

The teacher drew two more columns and asked them to first think of the bird and then list down all other things that were similar to bird on the board. The students were asked to give reasons as they did this. They gave reasons like, "bird ke jaise... kutta, wo khaana khaata hai, paani peeta hai" (similar to bird... dog, it eats food and drinks water). The teacher then asked them to think of all things that were similar to truck. Students gave answers like- "*cycle- yeh bhi chalti hai. Log dono par bethte hain*" (cycle- it also moves, people sit on both of them). The teacher then moved to things which had not been identified as similar to any.

Teacher: *yeh ghadi in mein se kis se milti hai?* (With which of these is watch identical?) The students contemplated and came up with various responses all of which the teacher wrote down on the board. Once the students had come to reasons like- this drinks water but the other does not, or one eats and the other does not, the teacher further asked them to now list all things which eat and drink together in column 1 and the ones which do not in column 2. He then asked them to identify more similarities between the things in list 1. With time and encouragement the students came up with reasons like- 'they all sleep', 'they all breathe'. The teacher then explained these features- eating, sleeping, drinking, walking are characteristics of 'living things' and that 'non –living things' do not have these characteristics.

The observations from the class show how beginning from objects found in the child's physical context abstract concepts like 'living and non-living' were built in collaboration with peer group in the guidance of the teacher.

Integrated approach: The concepts, concrete or abstract do not exist or operate in an insulated space. In the everyday experience of a child the linkages between his/her different experiences are not subject specific. Use of money or measurement are not defined by numbers and quantity but by the co-constructed meanings that have been assigned to them in a social and an interactive setting. Therefore academic separation between concepts may not be reflective of a child's

socio-cultural environment thus making understanding difficult. In Digantar there is an attempt to form cross subject linkages in textbooks and also teaching concepts by situating them in everyday transactions.

Language as a socio-cultural tool:

Content or activities are all dependent on a tool whose context specificity becomes important as it not only aids communication and expression but is also necessary for cognitive processes.

Importance of mother tongue: The appreciation of language as part of the child's socio-cultural context can be inferred from the classroom transactions where the mother tongue of child is allowed space when the child so requires. In Digantar classrooms while Hindi and English are the two languages taught, the child is not forced to converse in Hindi despite Hindi being a medium of instruction. The teacher can often be seen as attempting to converse the child in the child's own mother tongue if the teacher feels that the student will best understand in MT. The papers on language teaching in Digantar acknowledge the role of mother language in cognition.

> "Language is an integral part of, as well as necessary tool for, the development of understanding, ability of decision-making and ability to act... language is very closely related with development of understanding, especially in the initial stages of development. When a child's language is negated, called repeatedly wrong in the classroom, his confidence in his own understanding is eroded. As is already stated, this will make learning difficult, almost impossible for the child. If we want the child to learn anything, including standard language, we will have to respect his mother tongue". (Language Teaching at Digantar, p.1)

The philosophy of Digantar echoes the NCF 2005's emphasis on importance of mother tongue. Acknowledging the multilingual context of India, NCF 2005 too has stressed on the importance of using the child's own language to teach him.

> "In a country like India, most children arrive in schools with multilingual competence and begin to drop out of the school system because, in addition to

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several other reasons, the language of the school fails to relate to the languages of their homes and neighbourhoods". (NCF 2005)

However the use of MT in class is not clearly spelt out and much is left to the discretion of the teacher. The classroom in Digantar is not a bilingual one where all students know Hindi and share the mother tongue. Learning the local language is not a part of teacher training programme of Digantar.

Developing language as socio-cultural and a cognitive tool: Having emphasised the role of language as a tool for the development of understanding, ability of decision making and ability to act, Digantar has prepared documents or manuals as guidelines for language teaching. It is important that the language to which transition is made is also developed as an effective tool for thinking and communicating. This understanding is reflected in the name given to the series of books in Hindi- 'Bhasha Vikaas Shrinkhala' (language development series). The language teaching at Digantar involves two broad kind of activities:

> 'One, activities which strengthen the child's language abilities in general, the abilities concerned with communication, reflection, imagination etc. And, two, activities concerning the development of skills of reading and writing in a meaningful manner (Language teaching at Digantar).

Part II: Sensitivity of inclusive practices to a child's social identity and emotional needs

Socio-cultural inclusion by itself can be reduced to merely including children from varying socio-cultural contexts in a school or including examples from their everyday lives in textbooks. Creating space for a child to bring in his/her socio-cultural tools in the classroom may not necessarily imply a respect and sensitivity towards the larger socio-cultural context of the child and the social identity of the child embedded in this context. The second objective of the research was to study how different school practices are sensitive to the social identity and the emotional needs of the children.

Respect for child's home and language

Sensitivity while interacting with community: The texts developed by Digantar makes several references to children's home, parental occupation, festivals, etc., and one practice of the school that allows teachers to engage with the child's context from near is the regular community visits. The teachers make regular community visits to familiarise themselves with the child's family and community life and understand them better. However if the teachers during the community visits show reluctance in sitting with the members in their home settings, or in accepting food offerings, the community might perceive it as disdain towards their context. Respecting child's family and community is a major component of the teacher-training programme of Digantar as mentioned by the academic-coordinator.

> *"...yeh hai .ki shikshak wahan pe jaayega, bethega to jo maan samaan wo denge usse sweekaar karega aur Koi heen drishti se ya ghrina se nahi. Jabardasti to kissi se ki nahi jaa sakti. par wahan pe bethega, aur jo mile wo lega. Agar aap chai nahin pete to koi zabardasti to peelaega nahin. To wo yeh sakta hai ki main chai nahin peeta, paani pila do. Yaani ki jo yahan kaam karne waala hai wo training ke time se hi itna trained ho jaata hai ki mujhe sab ko samaan dekhna hai..-* it is that the teacher will go, sit and what respect and honour they give him, he will receive and not by looking down upon them or with repulsiveness. One cannot be forced but he will sit there and take what is given. If you do not wish to drink tea, no one will force so it can be like, 'I don't drink tea but give me water'. Therefore the one who will work here he will be trained in a way from the time of training that I have to see everyone with same view".[13]

For children, their family is the first social group to which they belong. Social identity according to Tajfel and Turner (1979), is that part of an individual's self concept that he/she drives from the knowledge of his/her membership to a social group together a with the value of emotional significance attached to that group. According to them individuals are motivated to maintain or achieve a positive self identity (belonging to groups that enjoy a high status). if the worth of this

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[13] Interview with Mr. Nauratmal Pareek, academic co-ordinator. He was talking about the importance of teachers conducting themselves sensitively in community without letting their biases and prejudices coming in.

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group is undermined by the school practices and attitude, this can have negative effect on a child's social identity. Therefore by respecting the child's parents and his community members the positive social identity that the child derives from the group is maintained.

Sensitivity to the emotional needs of the child

A child's cognitive, social, behavioural and emotional domains are not insulated from one another and each can have a potential effect on the other. Experience of failure in classroom, inability to form good peer group relationships, fear of teacher and the inability of the school to appreciate and be sensitive to the child's family context are some of the factors that can lead to emotional discomfort in a child.

Encouraging a close personal bond between the student and the teacher: In Digantar the relationship between the student and teacher was more personal than just academic. The students did not address their teachers as sir or ma'am, but by their names suffixed by *didi* or *ji*. the teachers admitted that this helped break the ice between them and the students and made the relationship more personal. A teacher articulated, *"kaun kehta hai madam ya sir bolne se hi respect hoti hai. yahan par bache humein dil se chahte hain. Naam se bulaate hain par 'ji' aur 'didi' lagaa kar bolte hain aur sabse bada ki dil se, apna hak samajh kar bulaate hain. Saath bheth kar hum sab khaate hain."* (who says that only by calling sir or madam only you respect. Here children like us from their hearts. They might call us by names but add 'ji' or didi- [elder sister] and more over they call us thinking they have a right over so. Sitting together we eat together). The closeness to their teachers made them more expressive of their feelings in their presence. They took their problems to the teachers, academic or to do with friends or family with assurance that the teachers would show concern. In instances when students faced problems at home, they felt they could confide in their teachers as expressed by the teachers when they reported instances where students had shared their concerned and sought advice. The teachers had come to form an emotional support-system for the children.

Facilitating inclusive peer-group cooperation and bonding: during the school years peer group plays an important role in the way a child comes to think and act. Peer group acceptance and peer group bonding is an important emotional need of the child. By laying emphasis on co-

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operative efforts rather than fostering spirit of extreme competitiveness, a foundation is laid for good peer group relation. Both in practice as well as in philosophy the effort has been to inculcate a spirit of collectivism.

Developing child's experience of competence: the experience of success for a child during his school years might be a reflection of his cognitive abilities; however this experience is crucial to his identity formation and self worth. Erikson has talked about the 'role of schooling' in our psychosocial development. The virtue of 'competence' emerges during the industry stage. This virtue is contingent upon experience of having 'completed tasks' as Erikson (1968) puts it, "competence, then, is the free exercise of dexterity and intelligence in the completion of tasks, unimpaired by infantile inferiority". The danger at this stage is the development of an 'estrangement' from (him)herself and from his/her tasks. One may develop a feeling that one 'will never be any good'. This is referred to as sense of inferiority. Erikson emphasizes the need to minimize this danger and teachers, according to him, are best placed to minimize this danger. In a reference to students who face difficulties during this time and consider school as something to be endured than enjoyed, teachers need to play an important role in recognizing their special efforts or their specific nature of difficulty and encourage them. To further minimize the danger of 'sense of inferiority', the teacher must also be able to emphasize on 'what the child is able to do' enabling him to experience a sense of productivity. The teacher needs to make the necessary efforts to discover the 'hidden talents'. The efforts towards the same are made in following ways:

- There are display boards in each class room where the class work students do during 'kala' and 'parayavaran' classes are put up. There is space for each child to display his/her work on the board. The teacher does not compare works but shows appreciation for all. The feedback is in form of suggestions and not a comparative analysis. By allowing each student's work to be put up on the board, each student is allowed the experience of having produced something tangible which is appreciated by the rest.

Practice of 'regrouping' rather 'promoting': Whenever there is a need felt for transferring a group of students from one samuh to another based on their increasing conceptual understanding, the term used is 'regrouping' rather than 'promotion'. the word promotion has an element of 'judgement' which if negative can harm a child's self worth'.

Part III: Nature of school-community interaction

Location of a school contributes to the identity of the school. The location to a large extent determines who gets to be in the class and this is in turn places an important role in determining what is expected of a school. The third objective aimed to study the nature of school-community interaction and their involvement in each other's domain.

Schools where children of specific socio-economic strata, say educated professionals go, will face certain kind of demands expected by the parents. In such schools the parents are likely to be giving a high fee, often serving as funders or donors for several school activities and infrastructure and also having the ability to provide a sound academic support at home. On the basis of their direct contribution to the school's income and infrastructural development, they are more likely to demand good academic results and overall high quality of education. In comparison, for a school located in a community where the socio- economic conditions of the parents are not high, the demands and the response to demands also differ. There is a complete shift in the power hierarchy between the school and the community.

Understanding child's context through community interactions:

One of the key features of the relation between the Digantar schools and the respective communities was the efforts on part of Digantar to make the community context relevant in child's academic life. The understanding of the child's context by the teacher not only enables teacher to be able to use it as a resource but also to understand the various domains of a child's life which are closely related. To be able to use the context as a resource it is important that the school familiarises itself with the context.

Knowing the child's socio-cultural context is necessary not only to include it as socio-cultural capital in the class, but also to help children critically reflect on it. Creating space for each child's socio-cultural capital in the class by itself cannot stop the process of socio-cultural reproduction. For instance, for a teacher to help children overcome prejudices, also requires that teacher understand the dynamics of the child's context and work in ways that are helpful in ...

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School as a participant in community life: the teachers pay regular community visits and participate in the local functions and festivals. This has not only played a role in helping teachers understand the community practices better but also building a relationship of comfort and trust. The comfort level between the teachers and the parents was observed during the community visits. The participation of school in the community life was also in the way of convincing parents to send their children or to stop them from discontinuing. The teachers had played a great role in convincing parents in sending their daughters to school and also in persuading parents from not marrying their daughters before they turned eighteen.

Community as a co-participant in the child's education:

The interaction between the school and the community was seen to be bidirectional where not only the school was also involved in and responsive to community activities but the community too responded to the needs of the school. The community's role was recognized by the school as more than that of forming the 'context' of the student. The community despite the economically challenging situation had directly participated in the infrastructural development of the school. Digantar in its publications has acknowledged the support the community can play in supporting infrastructural needs and also in ensuring the total enrolment. The role the community played in helping arrange land and construct structural infrastructure for the Bandhiyali branch of Digantar when there was a land dispute with the government is a reflection of the role the community has played in smooth running of Digantar. The relation between the two therefore can be seen of reciprocity and mutual respect.

Theoretical premise underlying Digantar's relation with community:

The understanding of community's role by Digantar is not merely of a co-participant in building and running of the school. The papers on the theoretical basis of Digantar's Alternative Education Programme look at 'two theoretical looking practical issues[14]'. The first concern refers to the effect the school has on the community.

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[14] In theoretical Basis of Digantar's programmeof Alternative education.

"An educational programme affects the world view and capabilities of those being educated. Knowledge of the physical world, of the socio-cultural world, values and skills are affected. This has an impact on the way the ones being educated will function the community. Therefore it is direct intervention in the community's life. No one has the right to intervene in any community's life without the knowledge and consent of the community itself. Now even the smallest rural community is not a monolith in terms of ideals, aspirations and felt needs."

... in the nature of community participation desired. One of the stated expected outcome of education was 'to bring about a commitment to humane, democratic and rational values as well as the capacity to work for their actualisation' and this expected outcome formed the theoretical basis for inviting community participation since it formed the setting in which the actualisation was aimed at being achieved.

This theoretical basis of the Digantar's interaction with community echoes the approach the 'culturalists' take towards education. According to Bruner (1996),

Education is not an island, but a part of the continent of the culture. It asks first what function "education serves in the culture and what role it plays in the lives of those who operate within it. (Bruner, 1996, p 11)

This theoretical premise not only justified the participation of the community but also provides them an active voice to express what they need. If education is viewed as a joint endeavour between the school and the community there is a possibility to increase both school and community's sense of responsibility and accountability. In scenarios where education systems do not address the needs of community or fail to be accountable there is a sense of disillusionment followed either by withdrawal or search for alternatives which may often come at higher price in case they happen to be in the form of private educational set-ups (Watkins, 2004).

Summary and Conclusion

The curriculum and pedagogic practices in Digantar illustrate how in a formal academic set up a space can be created for a meeting between the text and the context. The pedagogical processes

in Digantar were seen as utilising a child's experiences and skills embedded in his/her socio-cultural context for building concepts and also developing in the child a sense of competency and a positive social identity. Underlying all these practices was an assumption made about the child that a child's existing understanding and skills are the only available ground on which further development is possible'. The inclusive practices in Digantar were not only seen to draw from socio-cultural context the tools of learning but also provided space for including different domains of a child's life which such as his/her emotional well being. There was a marked consistency in the assumptions about the child's knowledge, skills, needs and the curriculum developed. There was also an explicit acknowledgment of the fact that education had the potential to effect changes in the society that we live in.

The aim of education for Digantar was not 'transfer of knowledge' or 'concepts' to the students but instead to facilitate their development as self motivated and independent learners engaged in a self sustaining lifelong learning process. According to the theoretical basis of Digantar's pedagogy, knowledge is seen as being 'formed' and 'reformed' in a participatory process between the students and teachers. The constructivist understanding of knowledge was seen as playing an important role in Digantar's appreciation of socio-cultural context.

While the time constraints did not allow for a prolonged engagement in the field or a comparative analysis with government run schools, it is important that one still reflects on the practices in Digantar and understand what has made Digantar become an indispensable part of the village community and a success in terms of statistics in a state which figures high in the list of dropout rate.

There are various factors which make teaching learning process in Digantar student friendly. These include multi grade classrooms, rigorous teacher –training programmes, the teaching learning material in form of context sensitive workbooks, nature of classroom activities and active participation of the community. However what makes these factors rise above the 'parts' to make a coherent 'whole' is a strong philosophy which links these factors together. The detailed prefaces to the various textbooks, the annual reports, and the various Digantar publications have consistently outlined the aims of education which guide Digantar's curriculum. The nature of pedagogic practices, the content of the textbooks, the participation of the

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community and the role of the school in the community have been well defined with clear linkages drawn between them. The process of developing context sensitive textbooks and various teacher training modules has not been absent in the current education system, however the process of development continues to be fragmented. There is no underlying theory or philosophy that could join these parts in a way that the whole is greater than the sum.

Critique

The research endeavour provided several insights into the processes that facilitated the inclusion of the social-cultural context of the child in education. However there are concerns which could dilute the child-friendly and socio-culturally inclusive approach of the school.

When the focus shifts from the text to the child, the role of the teacher also under goes a change. From one who facilitates transfer of knowledge from the text to the student, the teacher assumes the role of one who guides and mediates the co-construction of knowledge in the class by her and the students.

Stressful working conditions for the teachers

In the child-centric classrooms of Digantar, teachers play a central role. They facilitate the teaching learning process in the classroom and in doing so follow the progress of each child and provide guidance to several subgroups. After the school he/she is required to stay back and fill the progress report for the day for each child and makes plan for each child for the next day. With the teacher-student ratio in *Ratwali* branch being 1:30, it might be difficult for a teacher to attend to each student in a multigrade classroom during a 40 minute period. The teacher also forms the connecting link between the school and the community by way of regular community visits. The teachers are required to visit each child's home at least once a fortnight. While these practices ensure a child-centric and a community friendly approach, they also lay immense burden on the teacher. The day for a teacher begins at 8.45 am and ends at approximately 5.30 pm, making it a total of approximately 9 hours. the school works for six days a week and on Saturdays the teachers are required to have a meeting reflecting on the work completed that week and planning for the next one. The burden of teacher therefore is immense.

Each teacher also takes charge of an entire *samuh*, and takes all the subjects (Math, English, Hindi, *Parayavaran* and *Kala*) for them. A single teacher might not have the knowledge of every subject other than their own. This also requires them to update themselves. Classes on arts are also taken by the same teachers and the teachers are required to undergo training to learn activities like origami, clay modelling, drawing and other crafts to be able to teach the same to the students. This adds to the existing pressure on teachers besides the one resulting from long working hours. Under these circumstances a teachers enthusiasm, efficiency and cordiality are likely to lessen and thereby having an adverse effect not only on their performance but also the child-centric approach of the school. A teacher under great psychological and physical stress is unlikely to devote the desired amount of attention per each student.

Effects of having non subject teachers on quality of education

The concept of a single teacher taking all the subjects for a given class has its own drawbacks. Most teachers lack adequate knowledge of one or more subjects. In case of a classroom where all students are at the same level of conceptual understanding and there are a fixed number of workbooks to be completed, a teacher might still have the possibility to work at limited concepts in the subjects in which she is not proficient. However in a multi grade classroom where students are at different levels of conceptual understanding a teacher needs to have a very good understanding of all the subjects. The same teacher is expected to cover the entire series of workbooks in all subjects. This implies that the task of forming a strong base in all the four subjects lies with the same teacher. It was observed in one of the *samuhs*, that the responsibility of helping children build a base in Hindi, English, Math, *Paryavaran* (environmental studies) and *kala* (arts) was being borne by a teacher whose subject of specialisation was Sanskrit. Multi grade teaching by a non-subject expert teacher can defeat the very purpose of multi grade teaching which is to allow children build concepts at their own pace so that the foundations are stronger and not hasty. Strong concepts in any subject cannot be achieved by a sound methodology alone in absence of a subject expert teacher.

Language model not clear

Hindi and English are the two language subjects taught in Digantar with Hindi being the medium of instruction for the non-language subjects. The mother tongue of the child is not a taught

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subject. The Digantar papers have emphasised the importance of mother tongue in a child's learning process and also that learning first begin in mother tongue. However the use of mother tongue in everyday class transations is not outlined. In practice, it is left to a teacher's understanding and discretion.

Limitations of the research:

The scope of empirical and theoretical formulations that could be proposed at the end of the research was constrained by certain limitations.

Constraint of time: The one year research period includes time for formulating questions, reviewing literature, designing the study, developing research tools, collecting data in the field, analysing the data for emerging themes and then analysing the themes to develop new understandings. A qualitative research is characterised by emerging rather than an existing static data and therefore it is difficult to assign a fixed time period within which the data can be collected and analysed. The limited time period imposed constraints on utilising the richness of data for bringing out more themes.

While interacting with the community it was felt that the beliefs, values and expectations that an individual or group held were not always explicit or easily articulated. There was a need for a more prolonged contact and engagement to develop a rapport that would make articulations and co narratives spontaneous.

The time constraints also made it difficult to do a comparative study between the methodology and textbooks in Digantar vis-à-vis government run schools. A comparative analysis would have helped identify the strengths and weaknesses of the pedagogic practices in both types of schools.

Language difficulty: while Hindi is the state language of Rajasthan it is not the mother tongue of all the people residing in the state. Since the researcher was not well versed with the language spoken in Ratwali Village it affected the spontaneity of the interaction with the community. During most of the community visits, the researcher was accompanied by the teachers who played the role of translators and therefore with the translators being a concerned party in the interaction their own perceptions and views affected their translations.

Observer's effect: classroom observations were an important source of data since the processes of concept building using socio-cultural resources and the dynamics of socio-cultural reproduction could only be observed in a classroom setting. Researcher's presence in classrooms was therefore essential. However it was observed that the researcher's presence in the classes during the beginning of the field work affected the interaction between the students and the teacher and between the students. The students tended to be quieter and occasionally distracted. Once the researcher's presence had become regular and a rapport had been formed between the researcher and the students and the researcher and the teacher, the interactions in the class became more spontaneous and the participants in the class felt freer to express their emotions, both positive and negative.

Lack of scope to introduce variables: concepts differ in their level of difficulty, abstractness and also relevance to a particular context. Since the observations were being held in a classroom with decided curriculum, there was not a scope of introducing concepts of different types for example, universal or contextual and see how teachers used the available socio-cultural resource material to help children understand them.

Homogenous classrooms in terms of socio-economic status of students: the school was located in a small village where most villagers had similar occupations and belonged to a similar socio-economic status. The classroom settings did not offer the scope to study the processes of social and cultural reproduction considering that most students in the came from similar socio-cultural groups.

The school's curriculum was based on the premise that concepts can only be built on child's experiences and existing skills. However the homogeneity of socio-cultural context in the class did not allow the researcher to see how the experiences of child would have been used had the experiences differed in their socio-cultural location.

Implications of study:

To focus on access to education at the cost of equal access to 'quality education', would not be keeping to the true spirit of universalization of elementary education. It is important here to reflect on the spirit of this goal. What do we aim to achieve by universalizing elementary

education- a world of literates who can read or write or a world of empowered citizens who have equal an access to opportunities and can actively be a part of the democratic processes?

In recent years there has been a shift in focus from 'equal access to education' to 'equal access to quality education'. There is an acknowledgment of this shift in reports like the National Knowledge Commission report.

> "The urgent need for **ensuring universal access** of all Indian children to **good quality school education** hardly needs to be reiterated. In addition to this being **a fundamental right** of every citizen, it is also increasingly evident that a robust, inclusive and **high quality system of school education** is essential for social and economic development" (NKC, 2007).[15]

The problems of inequitable distribution of quality education do not only reinforce existing inequalities, but is also one of the most serious obstacles in way of universalization. Anita Rampal (2004), notes how the quality in state funded programs like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and Rajiv Gandhi *pathshalas*, is seriously compromised by way of employing poorly trained para-teachers, bad infrastructure, leaving the onus of providing space and structure to the community. She writes,

> "State provision of schooling has now been starkly stratified, and the poor are offered a low cost and low quality version in keeping with their position and capacity to pay (Anita Rampal, 2004).

In fact, various governmental schemes and reports lead to the inference that quality is seen as a concern to be dealt with once access has been ensured.

Coping with infrastructural problems: The lack of resources and infrastructure has been cited as one of the main reasons for government not being able to deliver on the count of quality education. Efforts like Digantar show how these limitations can be overcome by optimal and judicious use of resources. The usability of a resource as learning material may not be an inherent property of it. It is the creative usage by the teacher and students that actualizes its learning

[15] National Knowledge Commission Report (2007).

potentials. A pebble, a bird or a match stick, each could be seen as being used as teaching-learning material in Digantar. Relying on resources- concrete or conceptual that exist in child's own sphere of experience in his/her socio-cultural settings can make for cost-effective and more child-friendly teaching material. Good teacher training programmes and a sound pedagogy can play an important role in overcoming this shortfall.

Community support can also play a great role in helping overcoming infrastructural problems to some extent. If the community perceives the school as delivering what it promised, it can play a more pro-active role in supporting the school. The help offered by community in *Bandhyali* following the land dispute with the government is an example.

Interlinking of programmes as way of increasing and disseminating resource pool: besides the schools, Digantar has started various other programmes and been active in various other projects related to education. The various Digantar initiatives and programmes include:

i. The Academic Resource Unit (TARU) - TARU is the resource support wing of Digantar. The idea behind TARU emerged from the frequent demands from a variety of organisations for specific output based support. TARU undertakes research studies; need based training programmes, teacher education programmes, curriculum development, evaluation and documentation of Digantar's own programmes

ii. Certificate Programme in Foundations of Education - DIGANTAR has been organizing a Certificate Programme in Foundations of Education for last few years. The programme consists of a series of four workshops, each workshop spread over a period of 12 working days, and covering three courses

iii. Shiksha Vimarsh - Vimarsh is a bimonthly magazine on education in Hindi. It is probably the only magazine of its kind in Hindi that publishes material on both the theory and practice of education. on elementary education as well as provide readers with good quality material in Hindi.

iv. Shiksha Samarthan - Pehchan is an innovative project that seeks to bring 'missing girls' back to the mainstream education system. Pehchan aims to change the prevalent attitudes towards female education, ensure education for out-of-school girls and work with

mainstream government schools to bring about qualitative improvement in the education provided.

v.   Community Libraries – diganta runs two community library projects. One programme runs in 5 government schools around Jagatpura in Jaipur City and the other is in 40 government schools in Phagi in Jaipur district. In addition, there is a community library in Kho village in Jagatpura. These are relatively new programmes: the Jaipur programme began in mid 2005 and the programme in Phagi began in January 2006.

Digantar has also worked with several government programmes as a resource support agency. Some of these are Alternative Schools Programme of Rajiv Gandhi Prathmic Shiksha Mission, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh; Janashala Programme, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi; District Primary Education Programme, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi, SCERT, Chattisgarh; Lok Jumbish Sahaj Shiksha Karyakram. Shiksha Samarthan in Jaipur, Quality Improvement Programme in Baran and Sandharbh Shala Project in Chittorgarh and Baran districts are some other Digantar projects.

These programmes are not disconnected from another. Digantar's teachers are benfited by their own teacher traning programmes and the linrary Digantar has built for the community. the successful practices in classroom are documented and used in their training programmes and also guide their involvement in other programmes. The link that Digantar mainitans between them serves to make them into a rich resource pool. The government has worked at developing community libraries, initiating teacher training programmes and also attempted to link various other resource pools. However this needs to taken up more seriously and with more accountability. The linkages between different programmes and resources have the potential to enrich each other and have a wider reach.

Theoretical reflections

Education that is placed outside the everyday context of the child and does not include his/her socio-cultural experiences is neither likely to address the needs of the society nor retain the members of the society who find themselves absent in the text and the classroom transactions. Bruner (1996) articulates,

"What we resolve to do in school only makes sense when considered in the broader context of what the society intends to accomplish through its educational investment in the young. How one conceives of education, we have finally come to recognize, is a function of how one conceives of culture and its aims, professed and otherwise". (Jerome S. Bruner 1996: ix-x)

Drawing references and resource materials from the child's immediate physical and socio-cultural environment, allowing the space for the child to understand and communicate in the language he/she brings to the class before working at transition to the dominant state language, regularly visiting the community and participating in some domains of their everyday life are some of the ways by which Digantar has attempted to include the child's experience in the classroom learning transactions. The high enrollment rate and retention rate along with consistently maintained high attendance provide the statistical evidences.

The aim of education for Digantar has not been 'transfer of knowledge' or 'concepts' to the students but instead to facilitate their development as self motivated and independent learners engaged in a self sustaining lifelong learning process. According to the theoretical basis of Digantar's pedagogy, knowledge is seen as being 'formed' and 'reformed' in a participatory process between the students and teachers. This constructivist understanding of knowledge plays an important role in Digantar's appreciation of socio-cultural context. In recent years there has been a conscientious effort by educators to locate formal school setups in the local socio-historical-cultural contexts. The constructivist approach that has been influenced by works of Piaget and socio-cultural theories inspired by works of Vygotsky have together laid emphasis on knowledge as a construction which involves role of experience, both individual cognitive as well as social as individuals attempt to arrive at the sense of the world. The process includes 'meaning making' and building an interpretive understanding of the world. The small but significant rise in number of schools based on alternate philosophies of education and also the spirit of NCF 2005 reflect this change.

The limitations posed by homogeneity did not allow the researcher to observe the processes of social and cultural reproduction. however based on the observations it can be said that inclusion of context in academic setting for the purpose of concept building is not sufficient to breakdown

the hierarchical structures. The curriculum of the school may include the child's context in concept building and yet be insensitive to it. The focus on community visits in Digantar and also on the expected conduct of the teachers once in midst of community members highlights an important link between conceptual and social understanding of 'inclusion'.

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