

Non-Formal Education

Non-Formal Education: Aata Paatha

Aata Paatha- the words conjure up images of happy children having fun while learning. This is the very concept of a unique mobile resource centre that Adanya Chetana started in the year 2003. For children studying in government schools access to resources is low. These children come from economically backward sections of society. Normal childhood activities like messing with paints and colours, sketching with colourful pencils and crayons, playing with modeling clay, creating images on a computer screen, are all luxuries. Aata Paatha has made it possible for these children to do all these and more.

Aata Paatha reaches schools in a colourfully painted van. The van has a computer mounted in it that enables audio-visual presentations. There are comfortable seats inside that children can sit in. A couple of our own teachers accompany the van. They are talented young women who love working with children. They are able to match the boundless energy that the children have.

Aata Paatha caters to children from classes I to VII. The programme is in synergy with the curriculum prescribed by the government. The children, therefore, learn their lessons in fun ways – singing, dancing, acting, story-telling, audio-visuals, and through learning aids.

A healthy mind in a healthy body is achieved through games and yoga. Children get to use sports equipment that their school is unable to provide. Traditional games like kabbadi, gilli-danda, kho-kho, games that help in mind-body coordination are all included. These, of course, help them to not only get physical exercise but also help them to learn a lot of social and inter- personal skills. Sharing, waiting for ones turn,

strategizing to win, coping with losing, and so on.

One of the most popular modules has been the Aata Paatha cassettes. These have reached so many children, in so many schools, in so many places, that we have lost track! The cassette contains songs and stories from the text-book set to tunes that are irresistible. One is forced to learn them. Many popular Kannada singers and musicians, people from the field of literature and so on have lent their time, their expertise and their voices to this exciting and tremendously successful venture.

There is tremendous value addition for teachers too. The programme urges them to look at innovative ways in which to reach out to their students. Students learn using all their five senses. The programme shows them how to make the process of learning more effective. It helps them recognize the multiple intelligences available in the group and to nurture them. To top it all it makes teaching fun rather than a chore.

Aata Paatha began in Bangalore. The concept caught on and Adama Chetana facilitated the genesis of the programme in Hubli and Bijapur too. The concept, as well as the way it has been implemented, has received kudos from the Department of Public Instruction. We have also received support from Government of India for some components of the project. The National Council for Education, Research and Training has also appreciated the Aata Paatha programme. This has further spurred us on to work at continuously improving the programme, adding value to it.

Aata Paatha has worked under different time schedules in consonance with the needs of the schools. We have worked on weekly schedules, reaching schools every week, same day, same time. Short term modules have also been experimented with. Everywhere we have found that the children love it and the teachers want to use the methodology.

The delight with which the children greet the Aata Paatha van is overwhelming. Over the past three years we have been able reach out to over four thousand children with the joy of learning. This is quite a change from the dreary lessons that they normally had to go through. We do hope that many of them have got 'hooked' on to learning for life.