

# A PRATHAM LEARNING

*By Medha Aich<sup>1</sup>*

Travelling back through the time machine of my mind, towards my school days, I realise that I could have had it in a better way if I had a learning hub next to my house. The learning hubs initiated and facilitated by Pratham, are giving the children of today, a number of good times in their memory stock, to be cherished tomorrow.

The 'pratham' stage or the initial stage of a school life is the identifier and determinant of a child's calibre and feature from all aspects. Hence, it is needless to say that primary education forms the building blocks of a child's educational values. So, Pratham aims at enhancing the capacities of a child and shaping its intelligence, but in a far different way than the mainstream schools.

You can create wonders when innovation is the key. Innovation is something which has set apart the teaching patterns of the learning hubs. Breaking the stereotypical characters of school teachings, the teachers of these hubs adopt new techniques of teaching, depending upon the needs and capacities of the children. As the strength of one class is low, each child gets enough attention and care. They are taught according to their own suitability. At this very tender age, games and storytelling are the two most exciting indulgences on the part of the children; then why not strategise these two activities towards learning. It just sounds like 'learning ke sath fun free' (fun with learning). Children would not even realise when they have learnt a lot of things while listening to a story from 'Didi', or when they have started making words while playing with the letter cards. Even maths becomes a part of the children's story when they say- "I have taken 1 chapatti in breakfast and 2 chapattis in lunch. So, I took  $1+2=3$  chapattis in total."

The informality of the teacher-student relationship gives it a magical touch. The frankness in the children grows to such an extent that they voluntarily ask the teacher to give them some work. Well, personally speaking, I never dared to go to my teacher and ask her a single question, and I know there are many who would agree with me. You call it being an introvert, being not-so-smart or fear, we always used to hide from the sight of the teacher to avoid standing up in front of so many, being asked a question and getting scolded on being unable to answer in class. In fact, it was quite humiliating when the question was repeated to someone else and I would soon realise that I do not know the answer but the other one does. In contrast to this, the teachers in the learning hubs would not leave a child without making him/her utter the answer on his/her own. And not to forget, each one has

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As a student intern with Pratham Delhi, this article is about her experience at a Learning Hub during December 12- Jan 2013.

to clap on the correct answer. That is pretty motivating and encouraging enough to develop an urge to attend another such question.

In general, a child's individuality gets lost in a school where a class is packed with fifty children, where the teacher fails to attend to each. Though the teacher might figure out a child's potentiality or weakness, but fails to enhance or sort out, respectively. But the hubs have got a strategy for it too. Children with similar intelligence would be grouped together sometimes and given the same class work. Whatever obstacles they have to complete it, can be attended at a time.

True education is reflected when one is rich in moral values. Only the ability to read and write is not really enough to bring about a change in personality. The most unique feature of the Indian culture is perhaps paying respect to the elders and obeying them. The child seems to understand that very well. Where at the present times, we are fond of 'hello' and 'hi', saying 'Namaste' (greetings) is a self proclaimed protocol for them. As I entered the rooms of a hub, numerous children's voices greeted me with "Namaste Madam ji, Namaste Didi". I was overwhelmed! That was so cute! I had never expected that unusual gesture, living in the present. Where at one point, children studying in English medium schools believe in show off and getting away from their own culture and language; on the other, these children, who belong to the lower class, have nothing to show off, but to sticking to their roots.

As I have spent some time with these children by now, I truly see them as future mathematicians, journalists, doctors, dancers, architects and musicians. With their little twinkling eyes looking up at me, I could see big dreams and in their innocence, I could see the determination to acquire them. I hope the tiny road built by Pratham leads them to larger destinations of life, making them eligible to achieve whatever they want.