



Learning without Tears

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The school situation could be joyful and at the same time innovative. This has been experienced in many states where the Joy of Learning, a festival for school children, was conducted by Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti, (BGVS) an autonomous body created by the National Literacy Mission Authority, Ministry of HRD, Government of India. A fig out of the leaf was taken when in December, 93 the nine country Summit for Education For All (EFA) was held in New Delhi and where it was resolved to complete EFA by the turn of the century.

Additionally, the Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) in the country have given a tremendous encouragement to embark on such targets. Using people's participation and voluntary involvement as the main strategies, TLCs have shown that literacy can be achieved in a short time in a campaign mode. In fact, it has been clearly observed that in those districts where these vital components are weak or absent, the achievement levels are also poor. Total Literacy Campaigns, however, are only one component of EFA. The major challenge of EFA is Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). It has been told time and again that without USEE, the gains of TLCs will quickly evaporate. For the moot question here is if child does not read and write what use making the parent literate?

Recently Government have launched the District Primary Education Programmes (DPEP). For DPEP to be successful, it is imperative that a demand be generated in the community itself for elementary education. Supply side inputs are necessary, but not adequate to ensure UEE. The 42nd round of National Sample Survey (NSS) has shown that lack of interest and a drab environment in schools is a major factor for school drop-outs. It is for this stark reality that the BGVS came out with a concrete campaign.

A massive campaign was what required to rebuild the interest of children in schools and to motivate parents to ensure that their children go to and remain in schools. This ultimately called for making the teaching—learning process in schools interesting, joyful and relevant.

However, such a gigantic task which requires preparing a proper atmosphere and mobilizing the community was conspicuous by its absence in the country. The Joy of Learning campaign was taken up with this objective in mind. The Joy of Learning (JOL) campaign was undertaken at (a) Gram Panchayat level, (b) Block level, (c) District level and (d) National level.

A typical district programme consisted of about 100-200 Panchayat/School level



programmes, 8-12 Block level programmes and one district level programme. The average number of children directly participating in the Joy of Learning festival was something like 10,000 per district. About 1,500 - 2,500 teachers and other citizens were also involved in each district, that way making campaign truly participatory.

At the state level, BGVS state offices coordinated the programme. Apart from this several Joy of Learning Organizing Committees were formed at district, block and Panchayat levels. Formation of Panchayat level committees was given the utmost importance and this was the thrust area, where the JOL campaign block, and G. P. Each of these CSF also used to multiply the number of resource persons for the next levels of CSFs.

The second component of the Joy of Learning campaign was creative competitions for the children. These competitions were organised along with or just before the Children's Science Festival. Creative competitions varied from place to place. One aspect of the creativity corner was story listening. At some places it was story telling and in some other places it was plays.

There were also Quiz competitions for the children who took part in the festival. Every effort was made to make the quiz competition innovative and not run of the mill type. The objective of these competitions was not to test memory of the child but to ignite his/her inquisitiveness and curiosity about subjects which had no fixed format. Attempts were made to see that the competitions do not turn stereotyped.

The online creative competitions included various items like puppet making, room decoration, rangoli, drawing and painting, collage making, origami, clay modelling, etc. which helped in excavating the skills of the children.

There was a component for essay and eloquence also. This again was different from the standard competitions : simple questions pertaining to their day-to-day experiences. Apart from this, there were also avenues to incorporate various competitions like; Play writing/mono acting/Hand-written magazine competitions etc.

The third component of the Joy of Learning festival was the Science Picnic. At district and block levels, science picnics or tours formed an integral part of the children's science festival. The nature and scope of the picnic, of course, was different depending on local situations. The basic objective of the 'picnic' was to promote the observation skills of the children and to expose them to real life—situations. Picnic spots could vary from a cycle shop to a railway station or from a village pond to a river bank. In order to make the science picnics interesting and useful, resource persons were trained in the similar vein.

On the last day of the programme, the participating children and resource persons are involved in organising an exhibition cum village learning festival, for the benefit of the entire Panchayat. Various activities that the children have learnt during the festival are expected to be exhibited by the participating children. Efforts are made to invite all the children (non-school goings, dropouts) and their parents so that they get motivated to go to school or send their children to school — the main object of the village learning festival being motivating involving the non-school going children and their parents.

For the successful conduct of the Joy of Learning programme a number of trained persons were required. At the national level the resource support was given by All India Peoples' Science Network (AIPSN) and its member organisations like the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad, Tamil



Nadu Science Forum, Eklavya. The state level resource group was oriented at NCERT, New Delhi.

At the culmination of the Joy of Learning campaign a National Level Children Festival was organised in the Bharatiyam Complex, New Delhi from November 7, (C.V. Raman's Birth day) to November 14 (Jawaharlal Nehru's Birth day). Two children (one girl and one boy) from each district of the states were invited for the festival. The national level children's festival was again conducted in the guest—host mode. About 500 guest children from various parts of the country, and 500 host children and resource persons, representatives of teachers' organisations and activists in the field of education were also invited to get a feel of the Joy of Learning programme.

To consolidate the efforts of building up a conducive environment for primary education by motivating parents, teachers, students and the community and to make the process joyful and relevant through regular research and developments, Childrens' Resource Development Centres have been thought of. In Odisha in fact, a centre has already come up. In Orissa in fact, a centre have been thought of.

A programme of this nature, with such massive involvement of the teachers, students and

the community at large has to have a sustained future. Unless the gains are consolidated and the energy generated and channelised to even greater ends, the whole effort will end up in a whimper. It is with this object that the Joy of Learning programme is being followed up by activities which will not only make the school atmosphere more invigorating but will also usher in a change in the primary education scenario of the country.

The follow-up activities of the JOL programme have been thought of in several ways:

- * Setting up of Bala Sabhas in villages which will have a nodal centre for science education and upgrading of knowledge.
- * Strengthening Children's Resource Development Centres located in various state offices of BGVS as a resource unit for Universalization of Primary Education.
- * Intervention in the block primary education field through non-formal education.
- * Intervention in the school curriculum etc.

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