



Early Childhood Intervention in rural Karnataka - parents are aspiring for quality early intervention. Can educational institutions deliver?

The HLC story

Hippocampus Learning Centres (HLC) launched its 17 Kindergarten centres in 2011 to provide good quality affordable early childhood intervention to the underserved in rural Karnataka. In 2013, HLC reached out to 3000 children in 104 rural centres across the two districts of Mandya and Davangere.

The early childhood intervention constitutes a 3-year program targeting 2.5 to 6 year olds. The program has clearly defined learning outcomes that are developmentally appropriate. Domains of learning such as the cognitive, physical, socio-emotional and creative have been targeted for a well balanced approach to teaching-learning.

The children are all predominantly first generation learners. With both parents engaged in agriculture, the children spend 6 hours at out centres learning and enjoying themselves. Most of the children ask their parents to get them to the HLC centres even on Sundays.

The journey of successfully implementing this early intervention program has been an enormous learning experience for all involved at HLC. We have shattered many myths in the process.

The foremost one is the learning that parents are willing, rather eager, to invest in an early childhood intervention. At the onset, questions were raised if parents would want to invest in an early childhood program. What we learnt at HLC was that parents wanted an alternative to Anganwadis where their children could get access to the kind of education that would help build strong foundation for formal schooling. Many parents understood that their children would remain disadvantaged if they entered grade I without a formal early education intervention.



The other big learning as HLC evolved from a base of 17 teachers to about 180 teachers is that it is possible to source teachers from the local community, train them, deploy them and do this on a sustained basis. This way a woman from the community gets empowered and ensures quality learning for its children. This also increases community participation. Today, we witness parents enquiring about their children's learning, attending PTMs regularly and sharing notes on further learning for their children.

There are some successes that we at HLC are excited about. Our teachers no longer use terms such as "Manjunath is dull" or "Nirmala is weak in English". What they tell parents today is, "Manjunath is good at counting



but he needs more practice when it comes to writing numbers.” “Nirmala loves to listen to stories and answers questions based on the story, but she needs more help in identifying alphabets.” Child learning is assessed but in a friendly and a non-threatening environment.

The way in which our teachers in villages have been able to use phonics has been another pleasant outcome. Today the upper Kindergarten children at HLC centres read out – “c..a..ts..a..t on the m..a..t” stressing the sounds of the alphabet. The teachers as well as parents are thrilled at the manner in which the children have taken to reading simple sentences. It took us two years of deliberations and a small two month pilot to take a call on using phonics to teach children to read. The first challenge was the teachers themselves. The idea of phonics was completely alien to them. The training sessions where they practiced alphabet sounds were dominated by nervous giggles. In the classroom, the teachers were surprised by the pace at which children picked up the concept. There was no looking back. Today the teachers pride themselves in using the phonic method and talk about it to the parents too.



The stress on good hygiene at HLC centres has had a cascading effect. Parents come back and tell us that their son or daughter insists on everyone washing their hands after toilet. Some communities have reached out to us and made a case for building toilets if one does not exist in that village.

As expected in any endeavor, there are challenges that we have had to address on a continuous basis. In most villages (as even in cities), learning is synonymous with writing. Parents consider a written document as evidence of learning. This practice or malpractice of writing without understanding needs to be addressed not only at the ECE level but also at the primary levels across schools. At HLC we have attempted to address this through parent orientations at the beginning of an academic session. While this does have an impact, parents do come back with doubts when they see a child from a neighbouring ‘convent school’ writing A-Z in the very first month. There is a need for mass scale information campaign regarding unhealthy approaches to teaching-learning specifically in the early intervention years.

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Sesame Workshop India

Sesame Workshop India, the organization behind Galli Galli Sim Sim and more, uses the power of the media to help children reach their highest potential and prepare for school and life. They develop and distribute high quality and engaging content through television, radio, community radio, print, digital and outreach, to reach children aged 0-8. Their content aims to facilitate young Indian children's basic academic and life skills, while celebrating India's rich cultural diversity, in order to promote their overall cognitive, socio-emotional and physical development. Galli Galli Sim Sim, the television series, has been watched by 10 million children each year since its debut in 2006 on national cable channels-Pogo and Cartoon Network and national public broadcaster-Doordarshan. Its educational messages are extended through a radio program aired on All-India Radio and community radio stations, extensive community outreach, and applications on new and emerging media such as cell phones and internet. Recently they have entered the school education space through the launch of Sesame Street Pre-schools whose curriculum and methodology integrates hands-on project-based learning, with creative approaches to foster critical thinking and problem solving, laying a strong foundation to promote lifelong learning.

For more details, visit

<http://www.sesameworkshopindia.org/> or

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