

INDIA

Empowering students in the age group 15 – 17 in participation with respect to CRC in Kannur district, Kerala state, India

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1. Introduction

India is a country with diversities in social, cultural, educational and economic backgrounds of its people. Various interventions are being made in the field of education for a positive change in the country. The Indian Parliament passed Right to Education Act on 4 August 2009 for equity based quality education for all children in the age group 6 to 14 years.

In Kerala, there was a total paradigm shift from the content-based pedagogy to child centred activity based pedagogy with focus on critical thinking. Along with the change in pedagogy various attempts have been initiated in different parts of Kerala with regard to CRC.

Strong network of 29 change agents in five-six districts are in force in Kerala. They are working in Kerala since 2004 starting in batch 3. Projects with respect to CRC have been carried out only in selected regions and age groups. Intervention with respect to CRC in the age group 15 -17 was never attempted before in the state. *This project focuses an intervention with respect to CRC in the age group 15 -17 in Kannur district of Kerala.*

2. Frame of Reference

The Indian Parliament passed the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education on 4 August 2009 [Right to Education Act (RTE)]. RTE describes the modalities of the provision to free and compulsory education for children between 6 & 14 in India under Article 21A of Indian constitution. India became one of 135 countries in the world to enforce Education a fundamental right for every child. The Act came into force on 1 April 2010.

The RTE Act provides for the:

- (i) Right of children to free and compulsory education till completion of elementary education in a neighbourhood school.
- (ii) It clarifies that 'compulsory education' means obligation of the appropriate government to provide free elementary education and ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education to every child in the six to fourteen age group. 'Free' means that no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education.
- (iii) It makes provisions for a non-admitted child to be admitted to an age appropriate class.
- (iv) It specifies the duties and responsibilities of appropriate Governments, local authority and parents in providing free and compulsory education, and sharing of financial and other responsibilities between the Central and State Governments.
- (v) It lays down the norms and standards relating inter alia to Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTRs), buildings and infrastructure, school-working days, teacher-working hours.
- (vi) It provides for rational deployment of teachers by ensuring that the specified pupil teacher ratio is maintained for each school, rather than just as an average for the State or District or Block, thus ensuring that there is no urban-rural imbalance in teacher postings. It also provides for prohibition of deployment of teachers for non-educational work, other than decennial census, elections to local authority, state legislatures and parliament, and disaster relief.
- (vii) It provides for appointment of appropriately trained teachers, i.e. teachers with the requisite entry and academic qualifications.

- (viii) It prohibits (a) physical punishment and mental harassment; (b) screening procedures for admission of children; (c) capitation fee; (d) private tuition by teachers and (e) running of schools without recognition,
- (ix) It provides for development of curriculum in consonance with the values enshrined in the Constitution, and which would ensure the all-round development of the child, building on the child's knowledge, potentiality and talent and making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety through a system of child friendly and child centred learning.

Kerala, one of India's states successfully overcame the first generation issues in education and it was the 1st state in India to be recognized as a totally literate state in 1991. The net enrollment in elementary education is almost 100 per cent and now it is almost balanced among different sexes, social groups and regions, unlike other states of India.

Over the last 3 decades the approaches to literacy and education seem to be swinging away from literacy and education for its own sake to their potential and actual use in real life contexts. It is at this context that this study finds its relevance. One of the purposes of this study is to empower children in decision-making and to transform the school environment child friendly.

3. Purpose

Attitudes and behaviour of members of the student parliament, teachers and parents regarding participation according to CRC will be changed.

4. Methodology (Activities)

We have selected Govt. Higher Secondary School Thottada, Kannur for our CRC Project.

As per our initial project plan, our intention was to select Govt. Girls' higher Secondary School Nadakkavu in Kozhikode district but due to certain unavoidable reasons, the Principal of that school conveyed her inability to pursue the project and during the visit of our mentor Dr. Per Wickenberg in August 2012, we informed him of the situation and discussed with him for some alternative arrangements. With his permission we changed the school. At present we are conducting our Project in GHSS Thottada, Kannur. This school has two sections; High School for standard 8 to 10 and higher

Secondary School for standard 11 and 12. Head master is the head of High School and Principal is the head of higher secondary section. The school has limited infrastructure facilities and the students are from average and poor families. The higher secondary consists of 471 students with 20 teachers and eight classes. The high school section has 311 students and 18 teachers. Shri. Krishnadas has taken initiatives to introduce our project in this school. The details are given under 4.1 below.

4.1 Activities in the Project School

The following activities were done in the project school, GHSS Thottada. An initial meeting to explain the proposed CRC Project was conducted in the school on 14/09/2012. The principal, staff and the selected student council representatives were attended the meeting. All the higher secondary schools in Kerala have elected student representatives and the students will elect their representatives in an election during the opening days of the school in June/July. *Krishnadas* explained the CRC Project and collected the suggestions from students and teachers.

In the meeting, they selected *Shri. Shabil Raj*, a teacher of the school, as the coordinator of the CRC Project in the school. Students proposed his name unanimously and accepted. The meeting decided to convene another meeting with all the students of the school and to explain the CRC Project in detail.

The next meeting (as per the decision taken in the meeting on 14/09/2012) was held at the school premises on 17/09/2012. Meeting was started at 10.00 am on 17/09/2012. PTA members, teachers and all the students of the school were attended. *Shri. Shabil Raj, the coordinator of the project*, welcomes the gathering and opened that the suggested Project would benefit the school and the community by eliminating the ignorance of Child right and its perspective for societal development.

The School Principal, Ms. Remani, chaired the meeting and addressed the meeting in her capacity as the chairperson. Then Krishnadas briefed the outline of the project in his speech about half an hour and explained the modus operandi. In the meeting Krishnadas asked the members of the students' council to arrange a meeting and design a plan.



The student council consists of Speaker, Prime Minister and 5 Ministers. They conducted a meeting on 19/09/2012. In their policy resolution speech Student Prime Minister expressed their commitment to implement the CRC project in the school. As a first step they have decided to take up a task of *cleaning the school premises*. It was student council decision and this step was very encouraging for us. It was also decided in the meeting *to convene class meeting* under the guidance of the students' council for necessary feedback and monitoring of the proposed CRC Project every month. They have decided to conduct the first meeting on 20th of October 2012 for review and feedback.



As per the decision of the student council, they decided to clean the school premises on the 2nd of October 2012. There is significance on that particular day too. It is celebrated as “Gandhi Jayanthi”, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, Father of our Nation. For the smooth functioning of the work, the members of the council divided the students into four houses namely Red, Blue, Green and Yellow and distributed work among them.



We got several inputs and thoughts in our seminar sessions in South Africa and accordingly we with refreshed vigour and enthusiasm continued our Project in Thottada. As soon as our arrival from SA, In December 2012, we gave necessary inputs to the coordinator of the Project in GHS Thottada and he conducted periodical meetings with the student council members to monitor the progress. They have arranged a career guidance class in which students got opportunities to discuss their rights regarding the selection of their future career.



Students and the resource persons interacted freely and all the students appreciated the initiative and one of the students remarked on the occasion that it is their right to get information regarding the opportunities in the country for their future career.



They have also arranged *Human Rights Day* celebration on 10th December in the school premises on behalf of the *Human Rights Education Club* functioning in the school and the arrangement was very nice. They themselves took initiatives and invited local personalities in the meeting. As the change agents, we used to give necessary directions to students and to the coordinator Shehil Raj for the smooth going of our Project.



In another noteworthy initiative of the student council was to arrange assembly leadership among the students of the target class. They have tried to organize morning school assembly themselves with necessary inputs from their teachers.

They had enough discussions and debates in their student council and tried to sort out problems by their own. It was their practice to meet once in a week and to get feedback and members' introspection. In the academic year 2012-13 they had given prominence in their activities regarding cleaning and hygiene of the school premises as mentioned in the previous paragraphs. But in the academic year 2013-14 they have decided to extend their activities and it has been well planned and structured and they proved it when our mentor came to visit the school. During the days of importance, they had conducted

school assemblies and arranged competitions in various events like essay writing, painting, cartoon etc. The Prime Minister in her report has submitted that they had the confidence to state that their contributions towards the betterment of the school were much improved. The coordinator Mr. Shahil Raj, the teacher of the school, helped the student council members by giving appropriate advices and counseling.

It is also to be worth mentioning that, to our astonishment, the student council members have arranged meticulously the function on 7th August 2013 at the school premises to receive our mentor.

They have arranged a student council session and all of us witnessed it with satisfaction. The students have tried to internalize the spirit of CRC in all their actions and deeds. In the council session, The Prime Minister, Education Minister, Health & Hygiene Minister, Home Minister, Finance Minister and the Opposition Leader have expressed their thoughts and actions. Speaker of the council monitored the session.



In the meeting, students, parents and teachers have got enough opportunities to discuss with Per and to get in touch with the CRC concepts more clearly.



The local self government members have also received a good concept on CRC and our visit to the President, District Panchayath, Kannur.



We had interacted with Prof. Sarala, President and she had assured that her team will give priority to the higher secondary children and schools for the activities which we have initiated and for its continuance.

When we stepped out of the President's chamber we the team members were of the view that all of our objectives put forward for our Project has been going well and we are of the view that with our constant monitoring and feedback the spirit of CRC at the higher secondary stage i.e. for the age group 15-17 will spread all over the district in Kannur and gradually the whole state of Kerala

4.2 Associated activities by the team in the change project

A) Student Police Cadet Project (SPC Project)

Kerala Police launched this SPC Project with collaboration of SCERT and Education Department of Kerala in all the higher secondary schools in Kerala, India to inculcate certain values among the student community like:

- Physical and mental health among children
- Work productively with authorities
- Prevent substance abuse, deviant behaviour and violence among children
- Develop self-esteem
- Participate in tackling community issues and threats

Chandini, as one of the change agents in the team, took part in the meeting and workshop scheduled on 4th September 2012 at SCERT in Trivandrum.

SCERT (Kerala) functions as an R&D institute at the state level by providing guidance, support and assistance to the State Education Department in its endeavour to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education and teacher education. To achieve this goal, the SCERT conducts research Studies, develops information systems, curricular policies, and instructional materials and co-ordinates in-service education for teachers at all levels.

SCERT is concerned with the academic aspects of school education including formulation of curriculum, preparation of textbooks, teachers' handbooks and teacher training. It advises the Government on policy matters relating to school education.

The academic activities and programmes of SCERT are carried out by the various departments/units. SCERT plans and co-ordinates all academic projects and programmes in the state.

Chandini has succeeded to include the basic concepts of CRC in the module for the project implementation. The module preparation workshops have been started and the drafts are expected to be completed by the end of this academic year i.e., march 2013.

B) Presentation of the CRC Change Project

Ravishankar was invited to give a presentation on Child Rights in a workshop convened by State institute of Educational Management and training on 6th August 2012 at Trivandrum, Kerala, and it was appreciated by the audience.

C) Using Kerala media for spreading message on CRC

Ravishankar initiated an interview with the team's mentor Per Wickenberg that was telecasted through IT@School in ViCTERS TV Channel. One of the other former change agents in Kerala, Mr. George Joseph, interviewed him. Since the TV Channel has its root among students and teaching communities in Kerala, a wide message regarding CRC was popularized. It was also available online.

(<http://www.victers.itschool.gov.in/>)

5. Results

The CRC Project is in its new shape going on smoothly. Several initiatives on the part of students are being held in the school. They conducted class level meeting to discuss various activities on CRC Project and the convening of meeting is a regular process at least once in a month. The decision, execution and monitoring of the work were taken up by the student council members with the full support of the other students in the school. They have participated in various activities like Human Rights Day celebration, career guidance initiatives, three or four informal CRC club meetings to take decision on further activities. They have also arranged and conducted school assemblies.

6. Discussions and Reflection

When we sat together and reflected on our activities and Project, we could find all activities very easily linked to three different educational organisations of Kerala in the following way

The SCERT can incorporate necessary inputs of CRC in framing School curriculum in the state of Kerala, and the process of revising the curriculum has been started. The initial discussion regarding the Child Right frame work to be included in the curriculum has completed. The experiences we had from GHSS Thottada were benefited to transfer our experiences to the authorities concerned.

The DIET Kannur has already started the next phase of empowering student council in different schools in the district from the experiences of GHSS Thottada and with the support from Jilla Panchayath, DIET Kannur can go ahead well in this area.

IT@School Project with their educational channel can support the activities of CRC by popularising through media.

So the GHSS Thottada Project introduced for the first time for empowering the students in age group 15-17 was really a great success and it will give way for a lot of CRC interventions in Kerala.

7. Way Forward

It is on our part for a serious introspection to maintain the seriousness and continuity of the CRC activities in the school even after the formal completion of the Project. The existing situation in the school still requires a lot of subtle changes for ensuring the spirit of CRC in terms of Participation in these areas:

- *Learning Atmosphere*
- *Awareness among LSG members and the Department Officials*
- *Motivation of Parents*
- *Teacher Concern*
- *Opportunity for Co-curricular activities*
- *Opportunity for developing Creative talents among students*