In Puvidham we have always been trying to bring experiences into learning. The physical experience of any thing is the first step to learning. The experience maybe seeing, feeling, tasting, hearing or even sensing without the presence of any of the above (like the sensation that tells us when some one is watching us), these are the most important prerequisites for real and useful learning. The body is the child's first tool for learning. It's various attempts at learning to see, to hear, to feel, to talk and to move are made with out conscious emphasis on the learning . Only through the body experiences does the mind learn to recognize the parents and loved ones and other people and objects in its environment. It learns to classify and identify sounds and expressions. It learns to use its body to move in the desired direction. It learns to use its tongue to make the various sounds it hears. It learns to recognize the sounds of various animals and humans in the vicinity. It learns to walk. It learns to talk.

It learns to get what it wants by crying and throwing tantrums .It has the intelligence to train the adults around it to respond to its every need and desire.

And yet, as soon as the child can speak well, walk well and eat by itself - It is decided that it is now time to teach the child something and - So the child has to go to school.

So far the child has been learning as a response to the stimulus it has been receiving from its environment. Now suddenly there is a break. Now suddenly it has to learn things that have no connection with everyday living. It has to learn to separate the learning from the living.

So the very nature of learning is tampered with. And artificiality begins. Instinct, innocence, creativity, thinking and intuition all get affected. All become maimed. All become servants to memory. In Puvidham we try to stay with the same process of learning, learning through experience. We call it experiential learning. The process of experiencing is enhanced by discussion and expression and made meaningful and used in the construction of the world in the child’s mind as a continuation of the processes which have helped the child to learn so much already!

If children have to learn about cleanliness, they have to experience it. If they have to learn honesty, they have to feel the goodness of being honest. If they have to learn numbers they have to see the use of numbers. If they have to learn language they have to have the need and opportunity to use it. If they have to learn names of colours they have to experience the wonder of colour. If they have to learn shapes, they have to make them with their own hands and touch them every day to know their properties. They may not know the names, or the technical definitions but they know how the different shapes feel. They know the practical usefulness of each shape. This is more useful to the children when they create articles with their own hands. And making things is the best way to learn properties of materials.
The children in the school are now 95 in number and in the hostel 56. They are growing and some of the achievements with them are quite wonderful. Another child who is autistic and joined us last year is much improved and his learning pace has picked up phenomenally. All the children who changed schools and went to other schools are doing very well and that makes us feel that what we are doing with them in our school must be good. The feeling of success makes us happy and more devoted to our methodology. The way we teach science and art, language and math all seem to go well with the overall attitude of the children making them more confident and successful in what they choose to do.

Two of our first batch of the year 2000 are awaiting their 12th grade results and hope to get good enough marks to continue their studies in engineering. All seven of the students who passed from our school 8th level last year are scoring good ranks in the government schools. In fact we now know that any student who has spent even one year in our school begins to excel in any other environment after an initial hitch which they soon get over. They do fairly well even in private matriculation schools.

Part of this learning through experience brings us to the educational tours that we take them to. We try to make sure that every child experiences the ocean, the river, the waterfall, the mountains, the distances from one place to another, the scale of older buildings and the past history of our state etc. The 1st and 2nd kids went to kaigal water falls. The 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th children went to Rameshwaram to experience the ocean and the sand. They walked 20 kms up and back to Dhanushkodi. They saw the dam across the Vaigai river. They bathed in the waterfall at Kolli hills called Aagaya gangai. They went to Madurai for the history and glory of Tamilnadu. They also went for walks locally to the nearby hill to observe the process of soil erosion and to walk long distances. They all sit and draw what they see.

The children of the sixth and the seventh grade went to Dajia near Siliguri in Darjeeling to Natraj Gurukulam. The distance they traveled by train gave them an idea of the length and breadth of India. The Himalayas gave them the experience of cold, snow and mist, the difficulties of the hills and the difference in vegetation and foliage. They experienced a philosophy of life in the Gurukulam and they had to learn to understand a totally new language. The travel was extremely helpful for the two lady teachers who took them across and back. It did something to their confidence and self reliance which could never have been achieved by any number of lessons. They participated in a very simple way of life out of choice. We hope it has left an impression on the children which will help them to question the acquisition of material objects. We hope that they will chose different kind of lives as a result of the experiences of such a trip. They have made friends in Gurukulam and their friends will visit our school in July 2010 and stay for 3 weeks. All of us are looking forward to their visit.

Theatre is another experience which changes, moulds and creates empathy in an individual. In Puvidham we make it a point that all the children have a role in the dances or dramas. In spite of the fact that we now have 100 children we manage to have each child appear on stage.
Similarly when we have the science fair, the children participate in the selection and preparation of the various experiments to be performed. They make the arrangements and they explain the phenomenon to the visitors. They also keep for sale the puzzles, bags, handkerchiefs, bathing soap, hand woven foot mats, hand made greeting cards and other wooden and bamboo objects.

Dressing up to be someone else.

Apart from this, last year, school was much more predictable than the previous few years. All our old teachers have remained with us and will work at Puvidham even in the coming year. Muthulakshmi and Rani have finished their tailoring course and are well equipped to teach tailoring to the older children next year. Jothi has spent time learning nursery management and after a lot of struggle has managed to raise a few young plants for planting this year in the rains. Kuppusamy is now the new correspondent of the Puvidham Nursery and Primary school and is already busy with the renewal process for the school registration under the guidance of and along with Madhavaraj. Madhavaraj is now traveling to many other schools, as a part of his work with Asha Bangalore, learning new skills and bringing them home to us. We also get a continuous critical appraisal from him. He is able to spend time with the teachers once a month and help train them. Senbagam and Samantha had the opportunity to travel with eight children to Darjeeling to Nataraj Gurukulam and came back feeling much more confident of them selves. Rameshwari and a new girl Pacchiamma went for a work shop organized by The Krishnamurthy Foundation at Kaigal about teaching environment awareness and conservation and presented a paper. Their work was much appreciated and they were much enthused with energy from the experience. Meenakshi has been finally getting down to working with farmers and traveling to learn more about organic farming techniques and forming farmers groups. In short every one is learning for their own personal growth and this is contributing to our feeling of oneness and self fulfillment.

This year we participated in the movement against the introduction of B.T Brinjal into India. We held awareness meetings and organized a signature campaign in two nearby villages. The children were shown videos about the processes involved in genetically modified seed produce and the economics and farmer dependency it would create. They were made aware that the farmer as of today can continue to be an independent individual only as long as he can control and manage his own seeds. The minute this power goes to the hands of one multinational or the other, the farmer effectually becomes a slave.

signature campaign against b.t.brinjal
We also had to write letters to the Chief minister of T.N and the minister of Home affairs to help our friend Piyush who is fighting the seepage of chemicals into the ground water near Mettur dam by Chemplast and trying to prevent other big mining industries from denuding the forest covers in Kolli hills. He was arrested and wrongly accused. All the children and teachers wrote pleas to the concerned authorities to please release him and withdraw all charges since they were not correct.

We find that all the children benefit from the martial arts. Mr. Perumal who teaches them Karate is also a very gentle person and explains to the children that we learn the martial arts not to hurt others, or even for self defense but mainly for self discipline. Many children have taken green belts and are quite good at their katta’s. We also do pranayama and suryanamaskar along with a few other yogic exercises every morning.
Even girls learn Karate and Silambattam (fighting with bamboo sticks.) There is a lot of time for organized and unorganized games and the children seem to benefit a lot from being physically active. The farming activity also requires a lot of physical co-ordination and planning. It improves the understanding of areas and quantities besides sharpening observation skills. It is an activity which all the children like to do. This year children were also involved in nursery soil preparation and bag filling and seeding. The daily watering and other maintenance of weeds etc is done by hired help.

Apart from Asha London and Asha S.V, we have to thank a lot of individual friends and local supporters. The Rotary Club of Salem has initiated the drinking water project at the Surabhi hostel land. The bore was done in December and we found good water. The compressor pump and pipes are all finished. An Architect friend in Bangalore Georg Leuzinger has donated solar panels of 940 watts for the complete solar lighting of the hostel.

Another couple from Bangalore and long time friends, Suresh and Ramya have donated their Solar water heater as they upgraded to a newer model.

Our local support has increased and a lot of people provide meals to the hostel children for special occasions or birthdays of their family members. Mr. Manikkam from Dharmapuri is tirelessly furthering the cause of Puvidham and bringing us in contact with concerned people. Many people also provided groceries for the hostel. The “Udavum Ullangal” group in Dharmapuri regularly provides donations in cash or kind for the hostel and school.

One such donor provided the pongal feast for the children this year.

Every year we look back with surprise that so much time has passed and we did not even realize the passing of time. But this time we really noticed each day pass by as we were waiting for funds and the building was slowly getting completed. The water harvesting tank is still to be done. The electrical work on the first floor, the installation of the solar panel and the solar water heater is still to be done. The electrician who did the ground floor is now busy with other things. So we have to wait some more -------- patiently.

**DONOR FORM**

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Towards Corpus / foster care program/ running expenses of the trust and school.

By Cheque no: ________________________________ in favour of

PUVIDHAM RURAL DEVELOPMENT TRUST.

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Puvidham Rural Development Trust has 80(G) approval from the Indian Income Tax department. Donations to the trust are tax deductible. (80G no: c.No:9755(23)/SLM/2003-2004) The Trust is authorized to receive foreign funds. Our FCRA number is 075870079.