SIGNIFICANT ASPECTS OF LEARNING THROUGH THE METHODS USED IN AUROVILLE TAMIL SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

In a paper submitted at the ASHA conference at Chengalpattu in Tamil Nadu in December, 2000, several educational methods as well as their relevance in the Indian educational context had been explained. Even though many educational methods are in use in Auroville, only nine of them were described in that paper. They were: 1. Glenn Doman method; 2. Rishi Valley method; 3. Audio Tape method; 4. Phonic Sounds method; 5. Thematic Project Work method; 6. Education By Design method (E.B.D.); 7. Basic Sentence Structure method; 8. C.I.E.F.L. method; 9. Spiritual methods. This article highlights some significant aspects of the learning by the students when these methods are used for them.

THE SIGNIFICANT ASPECTS OF LEARNING

(1) LEARNING OF THE STUDENTS IS NOT TOTALLY DEPENDENT ON THE TEACHER AND ON THE LESSONS TAKEN UP FOR TEACHING

In all these methods learning is not a one-way learning as it occurs generally in Indian educational institutions, that is, from the teacher to the learner and, that too, mainly from prescribed textbooks. Instead the learner learns from everywhere even when the subject content might be confined to a lesson from a textbook. This ‘everywhere’ includes books, teachers, friends, fellow students, TV, radio, nature, conversations, and many other things. Whenever teaching takes place it supplements this learning. The students do not become totally dependent on the teacher for their learning. Thus learning of the student gets precedence over teaching by the teacher.

In the use of Glenn Doman method, the words selected for reading come from the children – words known to the children and words associated with topics interesting to the children. In the Rishi Valley method, the study cards that need the full help of the teacher form a small proportion of the total number of cards. Such cards mainly belong to the first two levels. The students at the 3rd and 4th level learn almost 90% of the cards without the help of the teacher. At the 5th level
the students study the prescribed government textbook fully by themselves. In the Audio-Tape method, the students play the language games by themselves and learn the language aspects intended in the game. In the Project Work method the students learn through discussion between themselves, finding themselves the answers to the questions given by the teacher, doing specific learning activities, and through interviews, observation and experiments.

(2) **LEARNING MATERIALS ARE PREPARED AS AND WHEN NECESSARY AND ACCORDING TO THE LEARNING NEEDS OF THE CHILDREN**

Flash cards for using the Glenn Doman method are written as and when needed and according to the interest shown by the child. If the children describe with interest and enthusiasm anything that happened in their villages or they saw during their nature walk, flash cards containing the words used by them are prepared for the next reading session. In the Rishi Valley method, if children need more enriching or remedial activities for any aspect of their language or math learning, study cards containing such learning activities are prepared on the very next day and used. In Audio Tape method appropriate language games for any particular aspect of language are selected and materials – spinner charts, accordion books, aesthetically designed dice games, post box charts, flash cards – prepared as and when needed. One kind of games for the slow learning students and another kind of games for the fast-learning students is prepared.

(3) **"HARD SPOTS”— LEARNING DIFFICULTIES — DO NOT ACCUMULATE**

At the primary level children have many difficulties in reading and writing in their languages correctly, in understanding math concepts, and in writing math steps. As different students studying under Rishi Valley method use different cards at one time, learning difficulties encountered by them is immediately noted and appropriate remedial activity is given either immediately or within the next week. Only after the mistake is remedied does the student move to the next card.

In the context of learning any subject, the students learn a lot from fellow students. This aspect plays a considerable part in the removal of their learning difficulties encountered in that topic. Fellow students find out the mistakes committed by the student and remedy them immediately.

The same thing happens in language learning using Audio Tape method. Language games are played in groups and each group has a group leader. Even while the language games are played, the group leaders correct the mistakes as well as help in overcoming the difficulty in speaking or understanding or in writing as and when they occur. As this is done individually, immediately and sufficiently frequently, the learning difficulty is not carried on. In all these
methods easy and frequent interactions between the students and the teacher occur. Hence whenever doubts arise or difficulties occur, the students immediately clarify the doubts or overcome the difficulties with the help of the teacher and fellow students. As a result learning difficulties do not accumulate, and the students do not give up learning and become a dropout due to the learning difficulties.

(4) **CLASSROOM ORGANISATION IS FLEXIBLE AND NOT RIGID**

In all these methods sitting arrangement in the classroom can be altered according to the learning needs and situations. As many games are used as part of learning activities, use of outside area occurs daily. In Rishi Valley method, daily learning activities are grouped into five kinds, fully self-learning, learning helped fully by the teacher, learning helped fully by the fellow students, learning helped partly by the teacher and learning helped partly by the fellow students. Accordingly the study cards are divided into five groups and the students sit in five groups according to the kind of study cards they get on that day. Hence everyday, regardless of the level they are, the students group themselves differently and sit in different groups. Classroom space is therefore one big room.

Timetable is another flexible thing when these methods are used. In the use of Rishi Valley method a big chunk of 90 minutes is available for each subject, language, math and environmental science. Each of these 90 minutes session can be variously used according to the learning needs of the students on that occasion. In the use of Project Work and EBD methods even though the duration of the Project is tentatively fixed, it can be extended or shortened when needed. If the students show a great interest and enthusiasm in learning a particular topic, more time can be given for learning it in depth.

(5) **SCOPE FOR STUDENT INITIATIVE IS CONSIDERABLE**

In the use of Project Work method for learning, this initiative occurs in a large measure. At the preschool level the Project work topics can be selected by consulting the children themselves. Many children readily suggest topics. The same can be done at the primary level. Organisation of the subject matter for the Environmental Science in Rishi Valley method is done in such a way that it is grouped into different topics or themes. Different kinds of learning activities are designed and cards prepared with suitable instructions for each kind of activity. There is plenty of scope for initiative for each student and the students fully exhaust that scope. For instance, if the theme is household animals or wild animals, then miming will be one of the learning activities. The students do this miming activity for all the animals known to them and that too in a repeated
manner and in a variety of ways. If some display of the products of the Project is expected, say the preparation of an illustrated book or a descriptive chart, the students studying under Project Work method do them in an ingenuous and creative manner. When the EBD method is used, the students suggest original ways to tackle the challenges or solve the problems contained in the study topics; several of their solutions are such that the teachers themselves could not have expected them. In organising their group learning activities, as in the Audio-Tape method or the Project Work method, the students sort out several things by themselves. They could naturally feel that they ‘own’ their learning.

(6) INTERACTION BETWEEN THE STUDENTS AND THE TEACHER, AND BETWEEN THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES, OCCUR FREQUENTLY IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR LEARNING

In all these methods no need to deal with all the students at the same time arises, even if their number goes beyond 40. Glenn Doman method can be used only with one or two children at a time. Rishi Valley method learning activities occur in groups of different kinds of which only two are teacher reliant. In the course of the use of the study cards all the students come under the individual attention of the teacher. In its Environmental Science class and in outdoor learning activities, a friendly interaction between the teacher and the students occur. In the Project Work method learning, even though the teachers need to address the class in general for introducing the Project and for explaining any complex and difficult aspect of the topic, the learning is done in groups and the doubts rising in the course of learning is cleared on an individual basis or on a particular group basis. Apart from that, during the field trip to gather information and during the brainstorming and discussion sessions arranged to process the information, a close interaction between the two occurs. As there are many group learning activities in all these methods, interaction between the students occur in a large measure and warm friendly personal relations get established in the course of their study.

(7) VALUES ARE IMBIBED SPONTANEOUSLY DURING LEARNING

As all these methods regularly involve learning activities in groups, the students acquire many values in a spontaneous and living manner in the course of their learning. Helping the fellow students in the removal of their learning difficulties is quite a common daily occurrence. In the Project Work learning, they acquire the values of cooperation and coordination during the implementation of their planning. Leadership values are acquired by some. Friendliness, honesty, truthfulness, transparency, frankness develop to a large extent since a feeling of
nearness with the teacher or other group members is always there in the context of their learning.

(8) **ALL THE ENERGIES OF THE STUDENTS REMAIN ABSORBED OR "CONCENTRATED" IN THEIR LEARNING**

In all these methods, the students find learning a very interesting thing in many ways. The subject matter at the preschool and primary level is learnt through many playway and active learning activities. At the secondary level Audio-Tape method and Project Work methods involve a lot of self-learning and a good amount of acquisition of new knowledge and new skills by way of new words, sentence making skills, new illuminating information and fresh understanding. Hence the learning occurs with a sustained interest absorbing all their energies. Due to the spontaneous acquisition and use of social and other values during the learning process, difficulties that usually occur in conducting the classes, like quarrels between the students, use of abusive words, reactions of jealousy, are minimal. Hence students’ energies have no scope for diversion in unproductive activities.

(9) **A CONSIDERABLE EAGERNESS TO LEARN NEW THINGS ARISES**

Since learning difficulties do not accumulate, the students are able to add more and more knowledge and skills to their mental storeroom. Learning activities are so designed that they are able to study the subject matter with comprehension and acquire and exercise their thinking and other skills. This gradually brings about an expansion of their being. As a result, they feel a readiness and eagerness in learning new things which they no more consider as impossible and which they feel confident that they can learn.

(10) **SELF-LEARNING CAPACITY DEVELOPS CONSIDERABLY**

As a result of all the above a considerable capacity for self-learning develops in the students. At the high school and higher secondary level this can develop into a capacity for self-directed learning.

In the use of Glenn Doman method, the children acquire the skills of reading and learning rapidly. Once they start exercising these skills, particularly reading skill, their brains automatically learn to process a large amount of information without the need of a teacher or oral explanation.

The entire learning process in the Rishi Valley method involves considerable self-learning. The students who are accustomed to use the Audio-Tape method for
learning a second language become capable of self-learning any other language using this method.

The use of Project Work and EBD methods involves a lot of initiatives from the students in many aspects of their learning any topic, and when they succeed in taking them, it results in a tremendous increase in their self-learning capacity.

**CONCLUSION**

India urgently needs quality education for all its students. The methods needed to provide the quality education are not only in use in different places in India but also they possess significant aspects that make the learning interesting and lively, and that increase the personality content of the learner. These aspects do not have much scope in the way in which education is presently organised in India. When India succeeds in finding out a way through which these aspects can find full expression, that will be a red-letter day in the history of its education.

*Subash*

*(November, 2001)*
Points:

1. Learning by the students is not totally dependent on the teacher and the lessons he/she takes up for teaching. They are all centred in the student.
2. Learning materials are prepared as and when necessary and according to the learning needs of the children.
3. "Hard spots" (learning difficulties) do not accumulate.
4. Classroom organisation is flexible, not rigid. (time table, furniture arrangement etc.).
5. Scope for student initiative is considerable.
6. Frequent interaction between the students and the teacher, and between the students themselves in the context of their learning occur during learning.
7. Values are imbibed spontaneously during learning.
8. All the energies of the students remain absorbed or "concentrated" in the learning.
9. A considerable eagerness to learn about new things arises.
10. Self-learning capacity develops considerably.