

8 October 2009

Follow-up visit to Doorsteps School site on the Pashan Baner link road, Pune (construction site: Orange County)

Site visit by K. Guruswamy [guruswamy(underscore)k(at)hotmail(dot)com]

Premnath had made a site visit to the Orange County construction site on the Pashan-Baner link road on 6th June. At that time, the local ZP schools hadn't started and therefore, several kids were absent. We had planned to do another follow-up site visit on 18th July. However, due to the swine flu scare, schools all over Pune were shut that week and this site visit could not get done as planned. The swine flu is no longer attracting the same media attention as it was a few months ago – however, people are still worried about the swine flu at this time (For example: there was a case of a student who was diagnosed with swine flu in my kid's school and consequently his school has been shut for a week now). Therefore, attendance in schools anywhere in Pune is lower than normal since this is the flu season. I was told by the teachers at the DSS school that parents are reluctant to send their kids to school if they have a cold/cough/fever. Any kid with these symptoms is also being turned away from the regular municipal schools since they don't want to take chances with the swine flu spreading through the school. Given this situation, there was a reasonable attendance at the balwadi, and the two support classes that were going on at the time that I visited (~3pm). One of the kids in the support class had a cough and mild fever – nevertheless she had shown up at school and was wearing a scarf around her nose and mouth.



There was this other smiling, shy kid (he told me his name was Umesh Tanaji Lokhande) who had a red kerchief prominently tucked in his shirt pocket. When I asked him why he had brought the kerchief, he told me that it was to wipe snot 😊 (see picture)



At this location, DSS runs two study classes – the first one is for kids who are at a low level of proficiency (viz. can recognize the alphabet, but cannot join alphabets to form words). Most of the kids in this study class are very young – however, there was one older kid (Rajesh Surendra, originally from Bihar – does not speak Marathi). This kid said that he dropped out of school since the teacher would beat him there. Consequently, he was only able to recognize the alphabets and was at the first grade level. The supervisor for the DSS site told me that they were trying to coach him and upgrade his abilities so that he could clear the Sarva Shikshan Abhiyan 2nd or 3rd grade levels. They felt that if they got him into a regular municipal school at the 1st grade level, then he would feel awkward going to class with much younger kids and might drop out. See a picture of this study class:



Kids studying the alphabet using DSS teaching aids in the first study class:



The second support class had about the same number of children (~10) and was for children at a higher level of ability (not necessarily age; most kids at DSS are between 6 to 13 years). The girl on the right in the picture (in the pink shirt) is bright and is studying for her 3rd standard exams.



DSS also runs a Balwadi or crèche for kids in the same location. While DSS is currently running support classes, they no longer run an NFE center since they feel that most kids here already go to school. They always keep trying to enroll kids in that area who do not yet go to a municipal school. Therefore, the DSS model is to set up a center is to run support classes to ensure that the kids don't drop out, and to get a teacher who will pick up the kids from their places, get them onto the bus, ride to school with them and then go back when school is over to bring them back. This is pretty much the only way that the parents of these kids will let them go to school. Given the traffic situation, they would probably not have sent their kids to school by themselves. DSS rents a bus from PMC to transport the kids to school and to bring them back. I have also taken photographs of the documentation maintained by the teachers to track the progress of each child (their abilities, viz how many alphabets learned, for

