

Visit to Seed Narpanigal, July 23rd.

By Melli Annamalai, Asha-Boston/MIT

I first met with Karthi, Elavarasi and Arun. Elavarasi is Karthi's wife and teaches at the centers as well. Arun was a student and has been a part-time coordinator. His English is good and he is the one who authors the reports that we read.

Unfortunately, some of the owners of the rented spaces for the centers asked them find new places. The library and long seminar hall had to be vacated. They have found alternatives now. The terrace which Asha had roofed is used for classes XI and XII now. The younger children have been moved to the space in the main office.

The main office is part of Karthi's home. He and his family live in a rented house and have given his home to Seed Narpanigal. This space has been outfitted with an overhead projector and screen with the support of 'Friends of Seed' in Switzerland. It is a very nice space now.



Younger children studying in the Seed Narpanigal office

When I was visiting this space a young girl (about 6-7 years old) came by and dropped her brother (about 5 years old) off at the center. What was really cute was that she also brought Rs. 10 for her brother's thenkoodu's account. The Thenkoodu initiative continues to work really well. Students and families are encouraged to contribute small amounts when they can. This is collected in each student's name, and at the beginning of the school year this is given to each student with interest to buy school supplies. It helps them absorb the principles of saving, and also gives them some money at the beginning of each school year.

I also met Mrs. Viji and Mr. Murugesh. They have been volunteering for a year at Seed Narpanigal. They had wanted to do something, come across the Seed Narpanigal website, and met and really liked the work here. I was very happy to have had a chance to meet them. They have been wonderful supporters for the work. They regularly come twice a week to teach. Mrs. Viji has a background in early

childhood education and that helps. They have brought structure to the teaching. Mrs. Viji was very, very appreciative of the Tulika books. She said the books were really useful, especially the bilingual (Tamil and English) books. They were both particularly appreciative of Karthi, his passion and commitment to the work.



Mrs. Viji and Mr. Murugesh



Arun, Karthi and Elavarasi

While there is a lot of structure in the way the classes are now planned and conducted, there still seems to be some randomness in the various modules they use at the centers. For example, an NGO will come up with a course on values, and encourage other NGOs to use it. Seed Narpanigal might use it at the centers. We should suggest that they focus on what they think is relevant.

They are eager to identify any improvements they can implement to teach the core curriculum better. The challenges have been summarized well in the report by Ms. Sara Imbach who spent two months with the project (see the report on page 49 of the annual report). It is to be commended that they have honestly included the report in their annual report.

We had lots of discussion around learning English. That is one of the most important goals they have (this is discussed in some detail in the virtual visit over Skype). Elavarasi commented that they lack confidence. Like learning English, teaching English is also a hot topic. There is so much interest among external volunteers in teaching English that Karthi has trouble scheduling them all sometimes. 😊 Having teachers to teach is one aspect of learning English – practice in speaking English, practice in reading, etc.

3 students are in a nearby private school, utilizing the 25% rule of the Right to Education Act. One is studying well. We should follow up on the other two and understand how this came about.



Students in class (it was early so they were just coming in)



Group project by students