In the journey of creating our own learning space at Payir, the academic year 2017-18 was important, with our teachers rediscovering this space to be one of pedagogies that bring out child’s creativity, happiness, skills and a space to imbibe values.

While we started this experiment way back in 2008, in between we were pulled apart by RTE, compulsion in the name of regulations from local authorities, syllabus centric approach, demand from parents, so on.

Even though the need for alternate learning space was deeply felt by teachers, they needed reflection and methodologies to internalize. So, well before the 2018-19 academic year started and regularly from then on, the teachers facilitated by Preethi started a number of exercises like:

- Self reading
- Researching from various sources on concepts, writing them and presenting as peer learning
• Using public libraries
• Meditating, which was a first to them
• Reflecting on feelings and their own understanding
• Self reactions on values in their life
• Exercises to be able to dance, act along with children

Another important aspect the teachers did concentrate on, last year, was having regular interactions with parents and visiting their home. This helped in retaining almost all our children. This year there are efforts to engage parents in more ways.

Payir learning center now has 27 day scholars and 36 residential children.

In almost all of Karate and Yoga competitions our children enter into, they come out with top honours. One of our girls should be getting a black belt in a year.

2 girls from the first batch (2008) of the Learning center, who joined a couple of years before in the Thenur Government School, will be appearing for the 10th exams this year. They are doing well in their academics.

The day scholars on school days and the residential children on all days receive our supplementary nutrition (400 kcal).

**Residential Children**

All of our 36 children are from economically poor and dysfunctional families. While some have a single parent, ill-equipped to support the kids, others come from families that have drunkard fathers with a regular incident of harassment at home. Such environment at home adversely affects the psyche of the children. The nomadic nature of few families prohibits them from staying at a permanent place making it difficult to continue their education.

The children come under a Government program Sarva Siksha Abhiyan Residential Special Training Center. The government as a social security to the children provides about Rs.1000/child/month, which certainly falls well below what Payir spends on an average of Rs.3200/child/month.

**Experiential learning & exposure visits**

Since the kids come from underprivileged backgrounds, they tend to evolve a defensive attitude and abrasive exterior nature as a means of coping with the harsh reality of their lives. To come around this issue, we guide them with the importance of accountability and functioning in a group.

The children are divided into small groups, each having children of both sexes and different ages and allot specific responsibilities. The teachers assign work with trust and encouragement to enhance their abilities. As children accomplish given tasks, we see a sense of pride, gain in self-confidence, maturity, discovering self-respect and children feeling happy about their own capabilities.
The following are some of the team responsibilities:

1. Personal Hygiene
2. Serving food and monitoring children in the dining areas.
3. Keeping the classrooms clean
4. Maintaining the cleanliness of the surrounding
5. Group playing
6. Yoga and study.

Weekly once they change their responsibilities taking turns and continue their work.

From April 27th – 30th, for 3 days, 8 children (4 boys and 4 girls) were taken to the District stadium, in Perambalur District Head Quarters, to give them training in rules and regulations of few games and sports, like, Volleyball, Running, etc. This was done with a view to equip them to organize Sports events in their school as well as in the neighbouring villages.

7 of our children (4 girls and 3 boys) attended their second year of the one month residential cultural 3 year training course in Trichy Kalai Kaveri College of Fine Arts. All of our children got either a Grade A or B.

Once a week the children are sensitised about environment and nature for which they are taken for “nature walks” around the establishment. They observe trees, plants, rivers, lakes, ponds and other natural surroundings which adds to their personal experience and gives them a practical understanding of the ecosystem around them.

As after many years, River Cauvery is flowing full, our children went on a picnic to view.

Our special children Prasanth and Nishath (brothers, 14 and 11 years) went to a special school in Chennai by name Vasantham, for a one-month special training from July 19th – Aug 19th.

**Showcasing their talents**

“Nature is Divine” is the title of a street theatre performance, performed by children along with few Payir staff in our neighboring villages - Nathakadu, Thottiyapatti, Thenur, Pudhu ammapalayam, Echampatti, T.Kalathur - in order to create awareness about the environment among the villages. They also staged this performance in Nehru Memorial College, Puthampatti. They did well and it was a good experience.
What our Children say...
“When some children make false complaints to teachers, teachers scold us without verifying what had happened. As we were not at fault, we get hurt”
“We enjoy watching movies, singing cinema songs when asked to, playing, learning Parai Aatam and going for field visits.”
“When we fight amongst ourselves and hurt ourselves, uncle and aunty get upset and sometimes, they punish themselves for our wrong doings. This makes us sad.”
“We like the way they care for us taking us, immediately to hospitals whenever we fall sick.”
“We like our nutritious food and fruits.”

What Our Teachers Say...
“It had been a great challenge to keep the children happy and at the same time, make them study. Each child is unique in their characters and habits. Though we employ different strategies to make them think, we often fall short in our efforts to understand each one of them.”

School Intervention
A very positive aspect of School intervention work has been that, Government school Headmasters now approach us for supplementary teachers and share a part of the teachers’ salary.

Now, we support 4 primary schools, 3 high schools and 2 evening centers. Additionally, EVidyaloka supports Skype based classes for 6, 7 and 8th standard children in Nathakadu High school.

Our teachers bring in an alternate thought process within Government school setup which by itself is refreshing for children.

With our senior teachers more and more internalizing alternate pedagogies, by this year end, we plan to come with a structure and evaluation for our engagement with School intervention.

Summer Camp
For the Payir team, there are not many things as satisfying as giving different exposures to kids and we do a Summer Camp every year for government school children at Payir.

This year, around 135 enthusiastic children between 8-14 years came from 5 villages. 45 of them came regularly for 25 days.

Childhood is the period elders influence children to develop each one’s personality masks. Kids created their own colourful outer masks. Clay is such versatile to play around, create objects and models and learn textures. The kids immersed themselves in making beautiful creations.

Likewise, a hat for the summer is just so appropriate. Kids made and wore their own hats that they made out of palm leaves. With coconut shells they made keychains, ear rings, pendants and by upcycling waste plastic, kids made some real trendy ornaments and gift items.

Kids also tried 'silambam', yoga, pyramids, acting drama, dancing, painting, paper quilling, photography, making rope out of aloe vera. Science experiments were a great fun.
14 kids went on a week long sports training at the District Sports Stadium.

Children shared that this is not a camp, but a mini festival kind of enjoyment, which was made possible by a variety of Resource people like Clayfingers Ezhil & team, Ananda Perumal, Arulagam Barathidasan and team, Arivarasan Vigyanrath, our PT Master.

**Thiramai Thiruvizha 2018**

Our 8th edition of Inter school competition, more of a month long carnival for Government school children had a new captain Selvarani. In partnership with Dream India and funds raised by our Chennai runner friends, 1550+ children participated across 9 primary schools, 4 middle schools, 4 High schools. The aim is that all children should get an opportunity to participate and to develop and exhibit their skills.

The children were grouped into Kid Junior, Kid Senior, Sub Junior and Junior. The initial school level literary, cultural and sports events included storytelling, elocution, mime, drawing, singing, quiz, dance & 100 meter sprint, long jump, shot-put, relay and so on.

After this, on September 1st, 2018, 450+ boys and girls across categories were taken by bus provided by Thanthai Rover Institutions, to the District Sports Stadium for finals conducted under the guidance of District Sports Coach.

The finals for the Literary and Cultural events was conducted on September 8th, 2018 at Thenur in Payir campus and Thenur Government Higher Secondary School. Around 540+ boys and girls across categories participated.

Both the finals, were day long events, a celebration for the kids with snacks and meals. We also distributed about 1600 children books and around 140 trophy cups to children who participated/excelled.
This edition was a little more special in the way that, a number of young volunteers from Bishop Heber College - Trichy, Rover College – Perambalur, IIT – Chennai played a huge role in the conduction of both school and inter-school events.