

Mouse-ful of Possibilities!

These two photos were taken in two different contexts, in different places, at different times. But keeping in mind the relationship between the two, I want to write about the two together.

The first photo is of a government school in a remote village called Chicholi in Tilda Block of Chhattisgarh. The second is at a Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (a government-run residential schools for girls) in Telangana.

As part of one of the programs run by the Foundation I work for, we started a computer-based learning program at a government primary school in Chicholi. Computers specially designed to attract primary level children have learning modules related to their subjects. The computer room is also specially prepared. The room is divided into three parts: Technology Corner, Craft Corner and Reading Corner. Whichever class has computer class that day in their time-table, the children from that class are divided into three groups and allotted one corner each. Each group spends 20 minutes in each corner. The teacher then seats them in different corners. During this hour all children learn the same subject in different forms (reading, watching, crafting) by spending some time in all the corners. In this way, they have the opportunity to understand a topic better.



In fact, it is a very successful model. As many organizations had attempted this method, we also thought of trying in a few schools and see; so, we implemented this three corner model. When I went to Chicholi to see how this program is run in the public school there, I talked to the teachers and the children there.

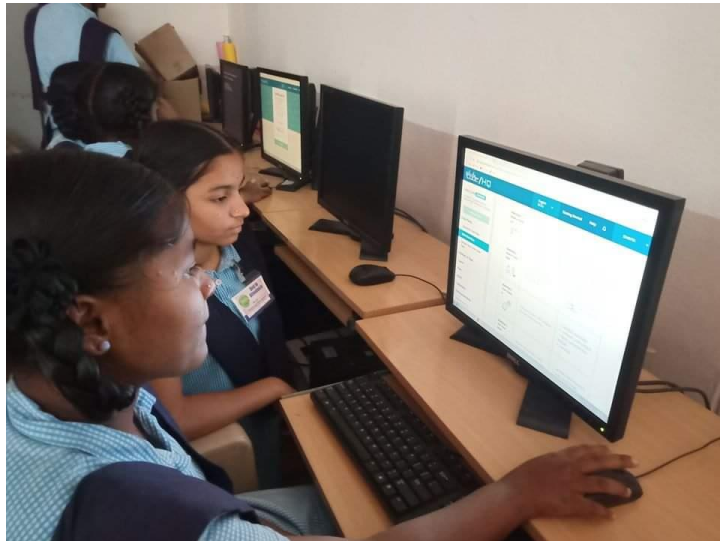
I was really pleased to see that the program, which was launched to improve children's learning levels, was actually achieving many additional benefits. The colorful computers in the school being attractive to the children led to their increased interest in coming to school. This has greatly improved the attendance percentage.

One of the children I spoke to who was a small girl whose parents worked as daily wage labourers. During the days when they could not find work in the village, they migrated to Raipur and other towns and returned after working there for a few months. In the past, the girl also went to the town with them. She used to be absent from the school for months on end. So, she was always lagging behind in studies. Since the introduction of these computer classes, the girl's interest in coming to school has increased.

That year, when her mother and father were going to town, she steadfastly told them that she wouldn't go with them and was staying with her grandmother in the village and was attending school.

The pass percentage in the school has also increased significantly but I cannot attribute it only to this single program. However, the role of computer education has been immense in raising the interest in education among the children and in increasing the attendance percentage.

And, coming to the second photo, we came up with the idea of starting coding classes for students in some of the public schools we work at last year. While we began to explore various



models to understand which level of students do start coding classes with, what to teach them, how to implement them without disturbing regular classes, etc., when we learnt that an American organisation called Girls Who Code had designed a special coding program for girls and that it is being implemented on a pilot basis in some Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs are run government run residential schools for under-privileged girl children). So, we went to the KGBV that can be seen in the photo to see how the students are learning coding.

At the time that we reached, the computer lab was bustling with 8th class girls at work. When I enquired them what they were doing, some girls replied that they were coding. When I quizzed, "What coding did you do? Can you show me some of your projects?" they competed with each other to show their projects. They were very excited to show me some snowman type animations, solar system projects, etc., and the music they added to them.

My focus was more on those kids than on all the projects. For those who are familiar with coding these may not seem like such great projects. But these were all children from very poor families. The self-confidence that the girls gained through working on a computer and doing a project on their own was evident in all the girls. That sense of achievement, the confidence and the interest that the use of technology brought in them seemed very interesting to me.

After looking at how much having just a mouse in hand and a computer in front of them had managed to increase the confidence of these girls so much, how much their interest in studies has increased, how the attendance percentage increased, how much their learning levels improved, and how much their aspirations skyrocketed, I thought wistfully how nice it would be if we could put a mouse in the hands of every student in the country.

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