

Title: Coastal Community Resource Center: An Open Education Platform

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Theme: Open Education Resources: Models to Choose Adopt and Adapt

Mangrove Ecosystem of Bhitarkanika:

There are many reasons why it is critical that we act to preserve the fragile coastal ecosystem of the Odisha Coast found at Bhitarkanika. Not only is the natural wonder of the sanctuary worth protecting of its own right, but also it provides critical cultural and economic services to the people of the region as well as the people of Orissa and India in general. In fact, Bhitarkanika is a habitat of global importance.

If you have had a chance to gaze into the dark depths of a mangrove grove, or watch the tide flow up to kiss the bright green leaves of a tree, if you have seen fiddler crabs seeming to play in some silent string orchestra as they feed or deer dancing along the muddy banks at low tide, if you've seen a gigantic crocodile sunning itself like some ancient wonder transporting you back to the time of the dinosaurs or watched a mudskipper grip the roots of a tree with the beginnings of limbs like the first creature to crawl out of the sea millions of years ago, you cannot help but be filled with a sense of wonder. You know that this environment is worth preserving because of its beauty, its history, and its spirituality. Earth, water, wind, fire, and space are all present here in all their glory. You can feel the footprints of Gods that must walk among these trees and their twisted network of roots, whistling with every voice in the forest, from the red-breasted kingfisher to the loud squawk of herons nesting on the magnificent island / kingdom of migratory birds.

About CCRC:

The Government of Orissa through its Forest and Environment Department gave an unused Tourist Rest House at village Gupti and its one-acre vacant land for the construction of Coastal Community Resource Center (CCRC) on May 5, 2005. With the support funding from the United Nations Environment Program of its Global Program of Action (UNEP-GPA) the CCRC was built after the MOU was signed between Government of Orissa and Sandhan Foundation. A great deal of activities were undertaken to inform, equip and empower the coastal communities to choose alternative livelihood practices, to curb their excessive dependency on the coastal wetland marine resources. DVD documentation, 'A Mouthful of Hope (ENG. 45 Min)' explains the works executed and achieved in the last two years.

Conservation Education through Community Schooling:

The Environment; it sounds so simple. Yet the world around us is far more than just a painting, a backdrop against which we live our lives. It is an ever changing, growing, complex world, like a machine operating smoothly, which each interlocking piece (of which human beings are but one) doing its own specific duty to keep the whole in motion. Normally, we like the view the environment from the point of view of the organism. An organism is a living creature and each person is one. There are billions of trillions of organisms on this planet, many of them so small that you need a microscope in order to spot them. They carpet nearly the entire world, from the freezing poles of the Arctic and Antarctic to the soil at the deepest darkest depths of the ocean. Populations of these individuals make up species, types of organisms. The human race is a species, the scientific name for which is homo sapiens. There are more than 36 million species of living things on this earth and we have discovered and named only a small fraction of that. Try to imagine how many kinds of living things that is. And each species may have anywhere from one to trillions of members. That's a lot of organisms.

Community Schooling is an innovative attempt to attract community folks irrespective of their age, gender and religion, what we have introduced in our UNEP-GPA assisted & Government of Orissa supported Coastal Community Resource Center (CCRC) to run the methodology of Conservation-Education. Here any methodology fits well with ease and that attracts the illiterate intelligent to understand what 'open learning' does to millions.

Our experiment on Open Learning has modeled 'Value Education' in the context of 'Online learning'. We are working to introduce Net-assisted value education in the mandate of Community Schooling. It is being adapted to address many of the coastal problems with traditional education and with the support of innovative approaches of computer application in forwarding Value Education.

It is the need and demand of the time to dress a changed role to teachers who should act as a Mentor, Motivator and Counselor what we have introduced in our CCRC as Volunteer-mentor or Value Educator to run the activities of our Community Schooling. They are motivated to attach thrust not on imparting bookish 'knowledge' but act on identifying the strengths and ready to play counseling to put the community folks and children in the right path of learning. Other than a guardian they are leading as catalysts to promote the potential creative abilities of the community students.

The much-discussed 'Type' indicators are the basis to act as the guideline to identify strength and weaknesses of the students. They are acting as the facilitators to change the "Personality-Type" to upward the homogeneity of serving conservation-education in spirit and philosophy. This experiment to introduce Volunteer-Teacher from the community itself has magnified the success scenario in this innovative endeavor. At every step the focus is on ensuring the development process in these coastal villages to remain "community-driven." The following are the innovative attempts of Community Schooling:

1. Expanding access to knowledge using ICT/ ODL on Biodiversity Conservation Education and Health Care.

In 2005 when the CCRC was engaged to train the local children on conservation syllabus it was heartening that they were not aware about the purpose of conservation. The above description on the mangrove ecosystem of Bhitarkanika with Power Point preparations, Slides and pictorial support those are hung in our CCRC Mangrove Museum convince all about the magnificence of the subject and the place of natural coastal wetland and marine importance. The regular community previewing of our

Documentary film (45min.16mm Eastman color) on the Mangrove Ecosystem has made them understood the intricacy of the mangrove vegetation and its surroundings what they see every day but fail to determine the natural assets in it and its ability of continuous sustenance.

The lucid coastal ecology although attract them what they are not aware about the purpose of nature in the swampy areas they live in. Compiling their queries the CCRC has designed audiovisual programs on sustainable development and ecosystem conservation planning to attend their curiosity with practical information. With the help of ICT they are made to learn on Health Education and care to pursue living in these inhospitable coastal situations. The given background information on conservation made them alert to spread awareness on the fragile mangrove ecosystem and their survival by community awakening with the formation of Young Eco-Army. They are trained to move around the villages to convince their parents, elders and friends on their responsible role as Young Eco-Army to safe guard the ecosystem to benefit all for all time to come if preservation and conservation and wise use of the coastal wetland-marine resources taken care around them.

2. Providing skills training and support for small entrepreneurs to increase opportunities for employment and income generation.

In 2006 the Young Eco-Army are exposed to a varieties of alternate livelihood options to give a halt to ruthless use of the fish resources by killing innumerable micro organisms by their parental livelihood practices which they use to from the time immemorial. They become vocal to limit their needs and opt for shift to new avenues of livelihoods. Their parents and fellow community members are convinced the new approaches and start appreciating the new role of their children as Young Eco-Army. The community folks more curiously the Small fishers attach all credit to the Community Schooling, a pioneer attempt designed by CCRC.

3. Protecting the environment, to ensure that natural resources are conserved and renewed for future generations.

The people live in mangrove ecosystem are unaware of the natural contributions to create and recreate the mangrove vegetation along the coast. The natural balance maintained with this ecosystem with the habitation of many animals and micro fauna are uncommon along the coast. With this backdrop they are made to learn the conservation of the resources to maintain the coastal equilibrium and to ensure the upkeep of the environmental status for the future generations.

4. The practiced strategies are to educate the coastal children and young people on the wise-use of coastal wetland –marine resources.

The strategic convergence to form the group of Young Eco-Army by educating the coastal children with the help of ICT/ODL pave a new methodology after a lot deal of innovations in community schooling. We have framed improved syllabus to impart teaching and assembled information to equip the Young Eco-Army with practical solutions how to wise use the coastal wetland-marine resources by limiting their excessive dependency on the coastal resources. This becomes a turning scenario to groom the Young Eco-Army with new ideas, which finally motivates them to spread awareness and campaign for the conservation of the ecosystem services. They are continuously informed and backed with new ideas to perform meaningful to arm the unique mission of the CCRC.

5. Community Schooling is an innovative attempt to attract community folks irrespective of their age, gender and religion, what we have introduced to run the methodology of Conservation-Education. Here any methodology fits well with ease and that attracts the illiterate intelligent to understand what 'open learning' does to millions. Online learning is being seen as a killer application of Internet. Web and Internet have already affected most walks of life; and it is currently hovering around education. We are trying to introduce WEB, the latest technology to the arena of Community Schooling. It is being adapted to address many of the coastal problems with traditional education and of the earlier approaches of computer application in education.

Volunteer Teacher: A New Role:



Volunteer Teacher with the coastal communities in CCRC community School

It is the need and demand of the time to dress a changed role to teachers who should act as a Mentor, Motivator and Counselor what we have introduced in our CCRC as Volunteer-mentor and others to run the activities of our Community Schooling. They are motivated to attach thrust not on imparting bookish 'knowledge' but act on identifying the strengths and ready to play counseling to put the community children in the right path of learning. Other than a guardian they are leading as catalysts to promote the potential creative abilities of the community students. The much-discussed 'Type' indicators are the basis to act as the guideline to identify strength and weaknesses of the students. They are acting as the facilitators to change the "Personality-Type" to upward the homogeneity of serving conservation-education in spirit and philosophy. This experiment to introduce Volunteer-Teacher from the community itself has magnified the success scenario in this innovative endeavor in these most poorly advanced coastal village situations.

The asset-based approach to development is an innovative alternative to conventional needs-based approaches. In spite of the wide variety of "participatory approaches" to development, the community development process is, in far too many places, still being "driven" by NGOs and other external players and not the community members themselves.

Approaches such as Appreciative Inquiry, Asset-Based Community Development, the Asset-Building Framework and the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach can assist communities to mobilize, restore and further develop their internal assets as a means of addressing fundamental issues such as poverty and injustice.

Young children will learn how to assist community members to identify and mobilize the skills of individuals, the capacities of local associations, the assets of businesses and institutions, as well as local natural resources toward community building activities and economic development initiatives. At every step of the way the focus will be on ensuring that the development process is and remains "community-driven."

As a result of this program, the coastal children are enabled to:

- Select, design and apply tools for identifying and mobilizing community assets
- Critically evaluate various methods and approaches in terms of their potential to strengthen the capacity of community members to control and sustain the development process
- Understand a broad range of asset-based approaches to community development
- Understand their own behavior and attitudes and how these elements affect their capacity to facilitate community-driven development

Conclusion:

Successes at riding the wave of information technology revolution have created hope for many in Odisha. For a part of our population, life, work, aspirations, present and future have changed considerably. But for a majority of some million children who enter the primary education every year, learning is still about chalk and slate, if they are lucky. Not all learning comes from teaching. Considerable amount of learning takes place from experimentation, interaction, playing and collaborating.

In fact, for the first 5 or 6 years of our lives, that is how we learn everything. Suddenly we go to school and are told to more or less learn everything by being told, by a teacher or a book. While it has its importance, this conventional way of imparting education encourages "parroting" rather than applying their minds.

However, the societies far ahead on the income scale have realized the importance of education that empowers the young minds to develop their active interest in the world around them and to engage with powerful ideas. Tools for writing, composing, simulating, expressing, constructing, designing, modeling, imagining, creating, critiquing, debugging, and collaborating enable children to become positive.

In short, introducing technology into the community learning environment through the 'Community Schooling' can encourage cooperative learning and student collaboration. Here, the learning is based on constructionist, that is, the learning happens by doing things together. Classroom activities are so structured that computers encourage collaboration built on learners' desire to communicate and share their understanding.

Beyond the classroom, computer networking allows students to communicate and collaborate with content experts and with fellow students around the globe. Communication tools like e-mail, bulletin boards, and chat groups allow teachers to exchange lesson plans and teaching strategies and create a professional community. It does not substitute for a school, but augments it, if nothing else, by virtue of being available to the child all days of the week and hours of the day.

Indeed, the practice of community schooling in the Coastal Community Resource Center demonstrated by Sandhan Foundation in Bhitarkanika Mangrove Ecosystem has its novelty in imparting strategic value education in environmental conservation and wise use of the coastal wetland-marine resources; undoubtedly an innovative endeavor.
