

आओ. देखें. समझें. सीखें. सिखाएँ

कोटड़ा
Learning Festival 2018

Learning Festivals 2018



NSE
Foundation



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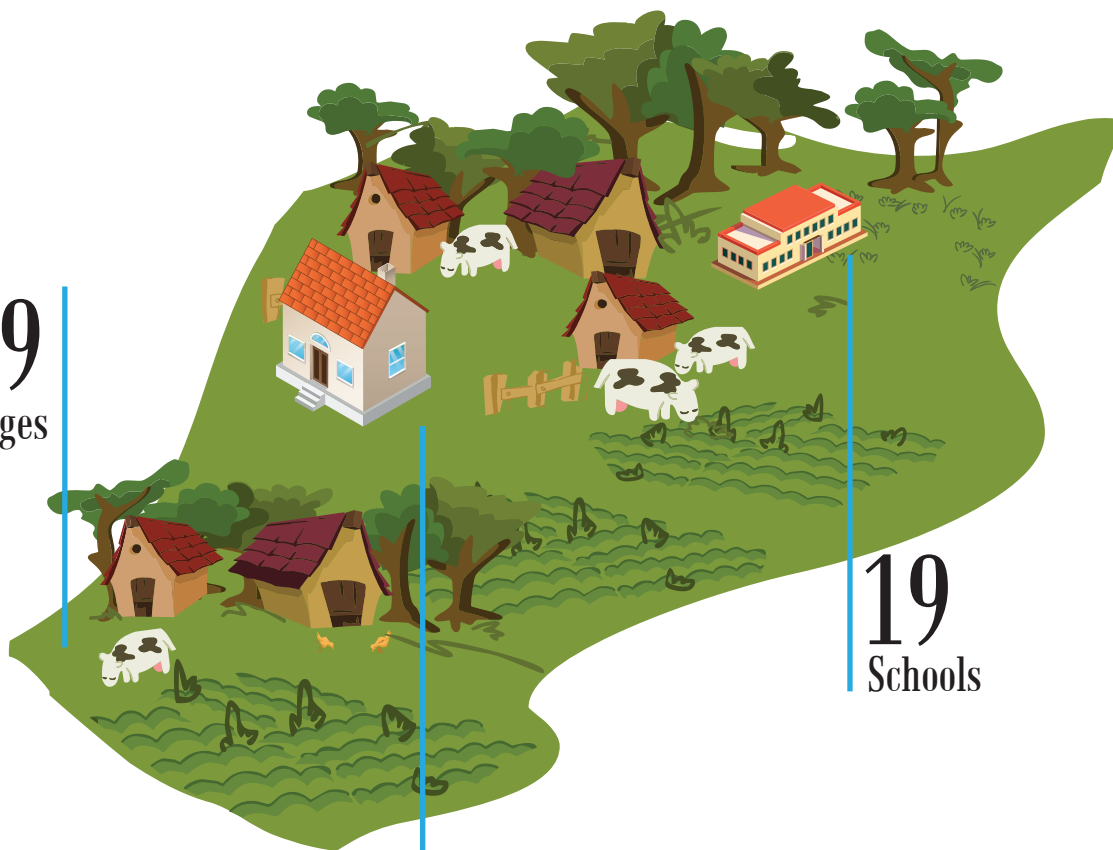


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FOREWORD

NSE Foundation's commitment towards our nation's social development is translated into key focus areas, which are: Primary Education, Elder Care and Sanitation & Clean drinking water. Their projects continue to drive the achievement of envisioned outcomes by fostering partnerships with mission driven organisations that have a strong local presence and participation. They reflect an innovative design using collaborative partnerships and are designed through a deep dive into societal issues to outline the goals that brought transformational results in these communities. Their efforts have been targeted at bringing in a sustainable change through participatory programmes that engage communities and beneficiaries.

Jatan Sansthan, our partner is a grassroots NGO working with the rural population in select districts of Rajasthan. In the past seventeen years, Jatan has worked on programs for the betterment of young people, women, children, elected representatives and marginalized communities.

Kshamtalaya Foundation is a non-profit organization, that envisions a world where every child realizes their true potential. And we believe this is possible if every child completes schooling and attains quality education. We are working towards bringing about a significant transformation in learning both on pedagogic and systemic level with the most marginalized children and young adults of our country. Our work area is primarily located in the tribal-rural pockets of Kotra and Gogunda of Udaipur district in Rajasthan through the iDISCOVER fellowship program. This 2 year program aims to build a cadre of youth who will become development professionals at the grassroots of education sector.

Two enriching years of working on the ground with Kotra's government schools has deepened our understanding of the state of education in rural Rajasthan's most marginalized communities.



Our firm belief that it truly does take a village to raise a child has helped us develop a systemic approach towards learning in these economically & socially deprived communities. Schools as learning spaces have not lived up to the expectations of children as a space for engagement and learning. Authoritarian structure, negative reinforcement, loss of individual autonomy, abridged freedoms, no input in decision making and regressive social practices that do not allow for parents and teachers' involvement in the child's learning are some of the main reasons behind the high drop-out rates, a major concern for us as an organization. The practice of learning within a school environment is essential for a child's understanding of the world around her. Knowing well that we, can no longer live in a bubble denying the impact of the outside world on us, these practices are required to be relevant and contextual to this fast growing world.

This publication illustrates our efforts to address the problem of extremely high drop-out rate amongst school going children in tribal-rural Rajasthan. Kshamtalaya as an organization is committed to building learner centric environments for children and re-imagining and re-creating processes of learning. Most importantly, we are trying to co-create processes that involve parents, teachers and the community alike in the child's learning journey.

Learning Festivals 2018

Kotra | Gogunda



Current Situation of Schools in India

If we examine the current scenario with respect to educational practices, the most critical goal in front of the Indian school education system is to improve learning outcomes and enrollment of all children into schools. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA), an Indian Government led initiative started in 2001 with the aim of providing meaningful and relevant elementary education for all children in the age group of 6-14. The SSA scheme supports states and Union Territories in their efforts to implement the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009. Popularly known as the Right to Education Act (RTE Act), it is a Central legislation that details the aspects of the right of children of age six to fourteen years to free and compulsory elementary education (Classes I to VIII). This is now a Fundamental Right under India's Constitution (Article 21A).

The SSA Scheme includes, inter alia, opening of new schools, construction of schools and additional classrooms, constructing toilets and drinking water facilities, provisioning for teachers, in-service training for teachers and academic resource support, free textbooks and uniforms, support for improving learning achievement levels, research, evaluation and monitoring. The Indian school system has focused on measuring and delivering inputs, and in this, it has largely succeeded. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in 2015-16 for Grades 1-5 was 99.2% and for Grades 6-8 was 92.8%. Pupil-Teacher ratio at national level for elementary schools was 24:1 and for secondary schools it was 27:1. On the contrary, in the Annual report by Ministry of Human Resource Development it is mentioned that a total of 60.6 lakh children in India have dropped out of schools.

Unfortunately, these higher enrollment rates for children and teachers has not translated into better quality education. The proportion of children in Grade 3 who can read at least a Grade 1 level text dropped from 50.6% in 2008 to 40.3% in 2014, before increasing marginally to 42.5% in 2016 and again to 53% in 2017 according to Pratham's Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) data. The proportion of children in Grade 3 who can accomplish simple subtraction fell from 39% in 2008 to 25.4% in 2014, and again increased slightly to 27.7% in 2016 and again to 29% in 2017.

| Schools in Rajasthan

The state has a population of 6.86 crores, and the status of primary education is truly disheartening. Little more than half of the total 20 lakh tribal children in the age group 5 -14 go to school. It is noted that as much as 9.2 lakh (46 per cent) children of this age group are not attending school.

The ASER data shows that, in the age group of 14-18, a mere 38% can read simple English sentences, 35.3% can do simple division problems and 72% of them can read only Grade 2 level of text of Hindi. This underscores an acute need for working closely with children, teachers, community and the local governing bodies to reinforce the importance of learning and also to enable them as active citizens of the country.

The numbers tell us that the state policies and interventions are focused on creating tangible inputs which may be a good start, but is not enough to help us achieve our long term learning related goals. We need systemic interventions that enable communities and local governing bodies to build ownership of the learning space. We need a qualitative shift in learning processes in schools so as to create a meaningful and relevant experience for both the educator and the learner.



Our Approach

Kshamtalaya believes that beyond a family, the school is the fundamental unit of learning and socialization for our children. When the community and local governance institutions come together to own and resolve the concerns that the education institutions are facing, there is every possibility that a sustainable and lasting change will occur.

To attain this vision, Kshamtalaya is building a cadre of grassroots professionals in the education sector who can bring a qualitative shift in the learning environment and its processes in government schools by working directly with children, teachers, the community and the local governance. Under the aegis of the iDISCOVER fellowship launched in 2017, individuals from Kotra and Gogunda (two blocks of Udaipur district) are identified and trained to work directly with schools. In order to create a diverse rich pool of change makers, we have opened up the programme to include individuals from outside of this geographic location. This dynamic group is collectively working on re-imagining schools as creative, nurturing and inspirational learning spaces.

An iDISCOVER fellow is placed in one government school where (s)he has the opportunity to meet and work with various stakeholders – children, teachers, parents, youth of the village, the sarpanch (head of the village council) and the Block Elementary Education Officer (BEEO).

Kshamtalaya proposes an approach that intends to work in close collaboration with the state and local communities, to better the lives of their children. It is an approach that invites the community and teachers' participation in the learning processes from the very beginning.



What is a Learning Festival?

The Learning Festival (LF) is a bi-annual event conducted over 6 days in schools or local community spaces. The days are designed in a natural progression; where the child explores various mediums of learning, moving on to choose one that she prefers and loves the most. By experiencing a pre-determined set of creative activities in the chosen medium, the child discovers new methods of learning thereby creating an urge to engage further. The learner then deepens her understanding of her particular choice by investigating, doing, creating and sharing with support from the facilitator. The event culminates in the creation of a platform for collaboration between various stakeholders like parents, teachers, principals and local authorities who come together and witness what the child has learnt and created.

| The Guiding Principles

Co Creation

The LF is organised together by the fellows and the people of the local communities. It is embedded in the context and needs of the children and communities.

These needs have been understood by undertaking primary stakeholder research conducted with groups of parents, teachers, youth and significant members of the local community.

Freedom with Responsibility

We believe that children are in their element and learn best when they have the freedom to choose, learn and create on their own, yet being responsible, through actions of accountability, judicious use of resources and ownership.

Safe Space

A non-threatening environment where children are encouraged, not looked down upon and feel secure enough to build relationships where they can confidently express themselves without the fear of judgment or ridicule in any manner.





| Operationalizing our Approach

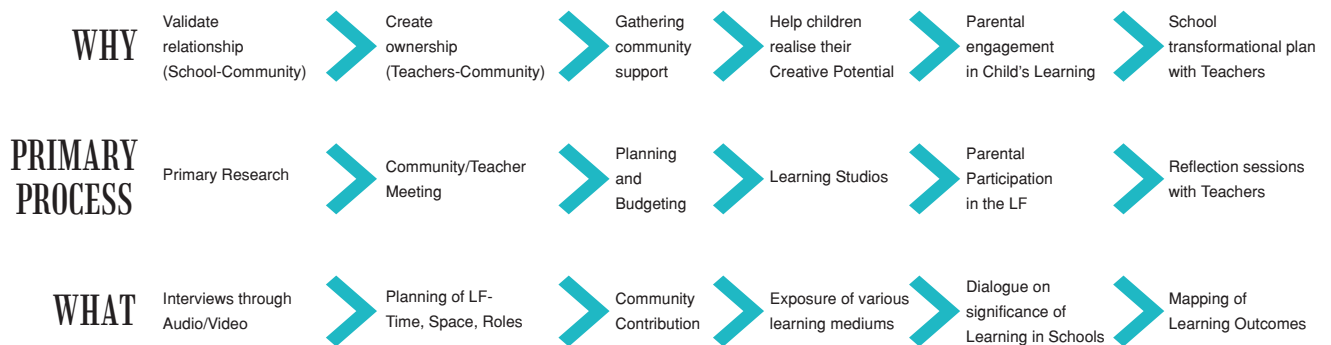
Kshamtalaya began by gathering information and building existing knowledge of the community and its people; helping us counter our own assumptions or pre-suppositions. The data was collected by the fellows placed in the respective communities, as they would familiarise and learn about the needs of the community. They spoke to children, parents, teachers, and local governing bodies - the Sarpanch and Wardpanch. The primary data consisted of guiding questions that helped in understanding the relationship between the community and school. The data also helped us in identifying the existing gaps between the primary stakeholders.

The next stage was involving the community and the teachers in all the key processes of the LF. From presenting the LF model, identification of venue and functional details of the event, to collecting contributions from the community and the division of roles and responsibilities between the various stakeholders; all this helped in laying the foundation for a community owned approach.

Meetings were organized to with the teachers to develop the LF model and their roles. This was then followed by discussions centered around experiencing everyday classroom sessions as learning festivals.

The LFs were facilitated by the iDISCOVER fellows. Regular meetings and reflection sessions helped them in evaluating their own plans and to align with the overarching goal – helping every child realize their true potential and to revive the spirit of learning in the community. On the last day of the LF, the fellows facilitated discussions with the community (parents, teachers and children) which helped in building a common understanding on the relevance of schools as learning spaces.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK



| Simulation of Learning Festival

An experiential learning session was held for the iDiscover fellows called Kshamta Utsav which simulated the processes of the LF. They explored the various mediums within the learning studios, some of these activities were new to them too. As they worked with various mediums in groups, created, tried new methodologies, and shared their learnings in the form of performances or artistic/crafted creations with a visiting audience that was specially invited for this purpose. A sense of confidence was seen in the fellows who were now ready to create a similar experience for children of their government schools. The training addressed two critical aspects -

The Learning Studios

The Fellows experienced each one of the learning studios that were set up and were later asked to choose what they related to the most. In due course of time, they experienced the progression of the festival model that took them from familiarizing themselves with the medium, to applying the methodology for creating an output using the same medium. The fellows then created their very own 'how to' manuals on facilitating each of the learning studios, further cementing their experience of designing learner centric approaches. Some of the aspects of the learner centric model that the fellows took away were –

- creating a safe space for children
- activities that range from basic to complex, allowing the child to choose one that is most relevant to her
- learning by doing
- using available resources to facilitate learning

Community Engagement

The iDiscover fellows invited urban community members to the Kshamta Utsav held at the Kshamtalaya Office in Udaipur. They acquainted themselves with Kshamtalaya's engagement with the rural children in Kotra and Gogunda and were extremely encouraging of the initiative and the evident enthusiasm of our fellows. Discussions on the purpose of education saw various stakeholders communicating their views quite frankly. The entire process of visiting every home and interacting with the families, inviting them to the Kshamta Utsav was an extremely enriching experience.

A not-for-profit organization, Kshamtalaya envisions a world where all children realize their true potential by completing schooling and attaining quality education. This is being made possible by empowering a cadre of youth as education professionals.

With the focus of our work mostly in Rajasthan, we are currently working in 30 Government schools of two blocks Gogunda and Kotra of the Udaipur district. About 30 kms away, Gogunda has a couple of tourist spots that people stop by at the highway. The deeper one goes inside, we find villages nestled in picturesque hills and ponds. We are working in 7 Gram Panchayats in Gogunda. Further away for 60 kms, Kotra is inhabited by the tribal communities Garasiyas, Bhils, Seheriyas and Minas. You will find the youth of Gogunda not only involved in agriculture but also move to the city for other opportunities. The youth of Kotra are inclined to nature and are primarily invested in agricultural practices.

The iDISCOVER fellowship launched in the year 2017 brought together young individuals from various parts of the country and the local communities where we work, in Kotra and Gogunda blocks of Udaipur district. The current situation of the government schools in these blocks shows a widening gap between student-teacher ratio, lack of exposure to alternate mediums of learning, diminishing child centered environment, massive drop-out of children from schools and lack of opportunities for the learner to ideate and create based on her/his strengths or potential. The widening gap between the stakeholders of child's learning (parents, teachers, youth and other community members) perpetuates the already existing problems as there seems to be lack of accountability and ownership within the community for the schools.

For the facilitators we aimed to create a space of learning that would begin from where they are. We believe that to be able to work in communities or school transformations, one must go through a transformation within. The Kshamta Utsav was one such experiential method of simulating the Learning Festival processes for the facilitators who will in turn do it with children. The experiential training went over a span of 4 days. The aim of the session was to help facilitators realize their abilities and their potential, thus building their creative confidence. This we did by creating opportunities to explore, choose and dive deep into their chosen mediums of learning. Along with this, we also aimed to build a sense of togetherness by involving the community in the various processes of the engagement. Our office space in Udaipur is set in a beautiful locality, which the facilitators explored as they visited the neighbours, introducing themselves and their work and inviting them to be part of the last day of the Kshamta Utsav.

Every process that was to be followed in the schools was demonstrated in its exact manner with the facilitators. To help out in this process, the core team members of Kshamtalaya set up the learning studios for the facilitators. They were asked to note down the observations, the steps within the processes and their daily reflections.

The days were filled with surprises, creating a shift in the thought process of the facilitators, working with the team, building relationships with the community each giving the facilitator a deeper understanding of working within an eco-system and working with children. One of our facilitators, a local youth of Kotra who has worked in development organizations before joined the fellowship to get a deeper understanding on working in government school. He was part of the Sports and Fitness Studio and the studio facilitator had chosen Table Tennis as his medium. He had never touched a table tennis bat before and after the three days of rigorous practice, focus and involvement, he was teaching the neighbouring children how to play table tennis on the last day of the event. "I cannot believe that I learnt it so fast, I am looking forward to creating such spaces for children to experience the same" said the facilitator.

Kshamtalaya wishes to create a space through its learning festivals, where anyone can come and realise what best they can do. The school is a key in facilitating children's learning. Here children spend more than five hours a day. This translates to 1500 hours a year; if 15 hours could bring such a shift in a facilitator's thought, imagine what we can achieve with the 3000 children that we aim to impact through the 30 government schools that we work in.

The Kshamta Utsav had another aspect to it – building relationships with the primary stakeholders of the child's life. It was an important lesson for our facilitators who aspire to be seasoned professionals in the education sector. They experienced a session on 'what is fundraising and why it is important,' 'Is it more than just raising capital to help fund our projects?'

The facilitators were given a project every evening, for instance, make new friends anywhere in Udaipur. Each day, they recorded their reflections on charts – Chai pe charcha or Exams pe charcha and sat down at popular public spaces welcoming the general public to have conversations with them. Through the discourse each fellow met at least 5 members leading to a reach of 150 individuals. In the vicinity of the office space more than 60 visitors dropped in to our office during the Kshamta Utsav, including children, women, men, the Principal of Dadiya school in Gogunda and our partners from Jatan Sansthan. They came to see colourful displays, creative expression of fellows through art, dance, theatre, board games and a puppet show. They remarked on the confidence and the creativity of the fellows and they reminisced about their childhood/college time interests and passions.

The sharing circle that took place as the evening drew to a close on the last day, was a moving one. Facilitators cherished the bonds they built, getting to know the team members, sharing space and spending time with each other. They felt like important members of the organisation critical to Kshamtalaya's work and growth. Another facilitator from Kotra said, "I have never done this before, talking to others about the work I do. Can I really communicate what I do? I have learnt to do that and now I can confidently share with anyone".

We wanted to build a sense of togetherness, a will to believe in oneself and a strong sense of purpose about what we planned to achieve. The entire process gave immense clarity to all the facilitators in terms of their goals, and instilled in them a confidence that they can achieve this goal by applying what they experienced with their team. The Kshamta Utsav was conducted in the month of March, 2018 for 23 facilitators who are on a journey of becoming grassroots professionals of the education sector.

Our Objectives

1. To demonstrate a model of learning that is truly relevant and meaningful to children and their local communities. To build creative confidence in every child; and demonstrate that (s)he has creative potential and there can be innumerable learning opportunities within their specific contexts.

2. To build a cadre of young professionals as grassroots educators by enhancing their abilities to engage with children, government schools and local communities. To develop an experiential methodology which focuses on their inner transformation as they seek to create transformation on the outer- children, schools and local communities.

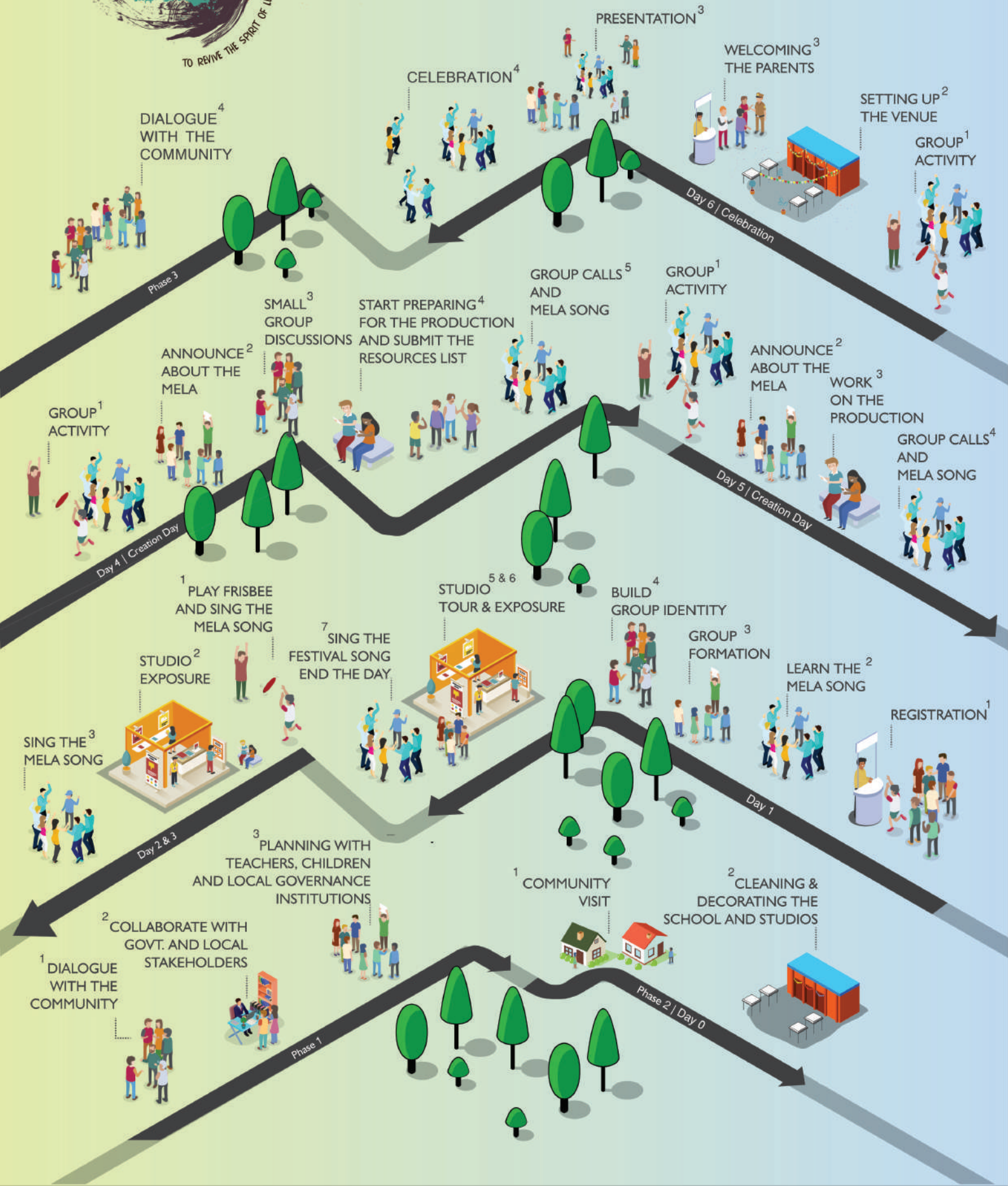
3. To bring about school transformation by closely working with the teachers in impacting learning practices and processes in their classrooms.

4. To demonstrate the significance of learning for the local communities and the local governance institutions by enrolling them from the very beginning, involving them in all processes and together building a community owned agenda of learning.



LEARNING FESTIVALS

TO REVIVE THE SPIRIT OF LEARNING



Kotra

• Tilarva

Children: 69
Girls: 20
Boys: 49

• Mandwa | Bakhel

Children: 242
Girls: 122
Boys: 120

• Jhed | Upli Jhed

Children: 180
Girls: 122
Boys: 55

• Bikarni | Ranora

Children: 117
Girls: 55
Boys: 62



• Rujiyakhuna

Children: 85
Girls: 43
Boys: 42

• Koliya | Dhadhamta

Children: 113
Girls: 67
Boys: 46

• Nayavaas | Sondruf

Children: 90
Girls: 37
Boys: 53

• Khajuriya

Children: 116
Girls: 66
Boys: 50

Gogunda

Ravaliya Kalan | Sagari ka Guda

Modi

Children: 110
Girls: 54
Boys: 56

Children: 113
Girls: 66
Boys: 57



Dadiya | Motavida

Children: 112
Girls: 34
Boys: 78

Semtaal

Children: 99
Girls: 46
Boys: 53



Impact on Children

Children over a period of ten days of the LF received exposure to various mediums of learning, which were relatively new. Apart from the novelty of activities and mediums, it allowed them to express themselves in many more ways than is the norm in schools. For instance: in singing and music sessions after a few hours of brainstorming and attempts to write jingles and songs, children came up with their own content and complete songs. They had a theme, they put words to it and strung them in a catchy tune. On the final day they presented to the larger community; their considerable effort, teamwork, confidence and enthusiasm was apparent and extremely heartening.

This was the case with large groups of children and clearly illustrates that appropriate facilitation allows children to build on their creative confidence. This understanding of the process of learning and an underlying trust and confidence in their abilities to 'create' in any situation, will hold these children in good stead through their lives. The larger outcome of LF is to build on children's abilities in a manner that they are able to apply their learnings in different situations.

Kshamtalaya Foundation, a not for profit organization started in 2016 envisions a world where every child realizes her/his true potential. One of its main pillars, the iDISCOVER fellowship launched in the year 2017 is working in 30 government schools of tribal-rural areas of Kotra and Gogunda of the Udaipur district. The fellowship is committed to re-imagining educational practices within communities having placed 30 young facilitators in the government schools. The facilitators, together with the primary stakeholders of the children's lives – the teachers, parents and the local community establish a community owned agenda of learning by establishing its significance and involving them in all the processes.

A village called Bikarni of Kotra block, is a closely-knit community of 200 households situated 120 kilometres from Udaipur. Inhabited by Jains, Muslims, Hindus and few tribal families, it is a popular market place for the many tribal villages situated in the vicinity. Bikarni and Juda are the only two villages of Kotra block that comprise of non-tribal population. The children of Bikarni are always high on energy, spending their evenings diving in the river; playing kabaddi or cricket in the Primary Health Center ground and the older girls helping their mothers with household chores. During the day, the Government Secondary High School is filled with children from Classes 1 to 12 housing close to 300 children from Bikarni and the nearby villages.

The facilitator placed in Bikarni took up an ASER baseline study to know the current levels of learning of the students of classes 1 to 5. In that, it was seen that 42 of 58 of the children were in the beginner level (not able to identify letters of the alphabet). 23 of them couldn't identify single digits and 28 others could identify these but were not able to solve simple arithmetic problems. With existing teaching techniques that mostly resort to instructional ways, de-limiting spaces within classrooms and lack of hands-on learning methodology, the above numbers demonstrate the learning gaps quite clearly.

Believing that every child has a creative potential, the Learning Festival program is a medium through which we aim to begin a dialogue about what a child needs best. The facilitators who are part of the iDISCOVER fellowship, anchor the Learning Festival in their own schools. They demonstrate the practices of a learner centric model that is designed with the child at the core. They provide children with space to explore multi-art mediums out of which they choose one, thereby respecting their decisions and giving them the power over what they want to learn. The facilitators focus on building a relationship with trust, love and care, which helps in facilitating a journey where they are both learning together. It is also open to children of all ages, creating a peer learning environment where the older children are helping the younger ones in their learning journey.

In one such festival conducted in Bikarni, Priyanka a 5th standard student participated in the music studio along with 8 of her friends who go to class 3 and 4. The number rose to an average of 25 per studio in the following days of the festival, which overall reached out to 150 children who participated in 5 studios.

Priyanka and her friends explored the other studios like electronics and electricals, puppetry and story-telling, craft & toy-making, drawing and imagination before choosing the music and dance studio -because she loves to dance.

With a design of building creative confidence in children, the days in the studio had a progression that began with 'exposure day' where they were introduced to various kinds of songs and led to 'creation day' of writing one's own song. The facilitator created a conducive environment by asking questions and encouraging them to think about any favorite animal, thing to eat or what they love to do. The focus was to let them express what is inside them first. The facilitator would go on writing these little joys of their lives and together they played with the words and arranged it into a song. The group was in absolute disbelief! They thought they could never compose a song as they were never 'taught' how to. The next day, Priyanka walked up to the facilitator and tucked a folded piece of paper into the facilitator's hands and she told her, "Maine titli pe ek gaana likha hai, didi" (I have written a song about butterfly, sister) and the group sat together rephrasing and reworking by getting an older student to write for them.

Once they created the song, the facilitator wrote it on a large piece of paper and stuck it in the classroom. One can see children huddled around the paper taking the help of the facilitator or an older student of the school trying to read the song that they wrote, thereby creating a need to learn how to read.



Children experienced series of facilitative sessions which were directed to eliciting their ideas and their views of life. Many activities simply allowed them to acquire the vocabulary of the medium for better expression, and were instructional in nature. However, most activities were built on a premise that would facilitate the children's point of view and allow the child to design and take the work forward. For Instance: in the stitching and embroidery studio, the children learnt how to make bags and stitch their names onto it. Picking this up, children went on to make pot holders, ornaments to decorate their cattle and dusters for the classrooms, all by themselves.

The LF environment are partially self-directed in design, they leave children with basic instructions and then encourage them to own their learning pathways. Clearly the aim of LF is to create autonomy for children to choose, learn and apply based on their own proclivity, needs and priorities. This is their first transition from a completely guided instructional environment to experiencing a chance to make their own decisions. A big shift. One that is facilitated carefully in the LFs.

Children were not separated by age and grade. They were constituted into groups using a randomized game. They had to identify with that group, participate and contribute to all sessions for the following 10 days. This thoroughly encouraged mixed age group formation and the results were worthwhile - older children helping out the younger ones, younger ones integrating quite naturally and also choosing activities that may have been perceived as 'age inappropriate.' This was very different from clubbing different grades of children in one classroom when a teacher is absent. For instance: in the Art & Craft studio the children worked in pairs – one being older and the other being younger. The older ones were helping the younger ones to use the scissors. They also learnt paper folds together, each time looking out for their younger partners. Consciously and unconsciously they were creating a safe and learning environment for others and themselves.

It truly goes to show that learning never does happen in silos of either age or of subjects pre-determined in our learning environments. Multi age group learning demonstrates how children actively learn together, teach each other and lead when required, making them both responsible and independent.

Creativity is as important as literacy in Education. Most children are naturally curious and creative. The renowned painter Picasso said “Every child is a born artist, we forget it as we grow up”. By this he means that every child is an artist and if they are frightened to make mistakes, they won’t be able to create anything. The formal, instruction based learning practices in most school classrooms diminishes this innate creativity of children.

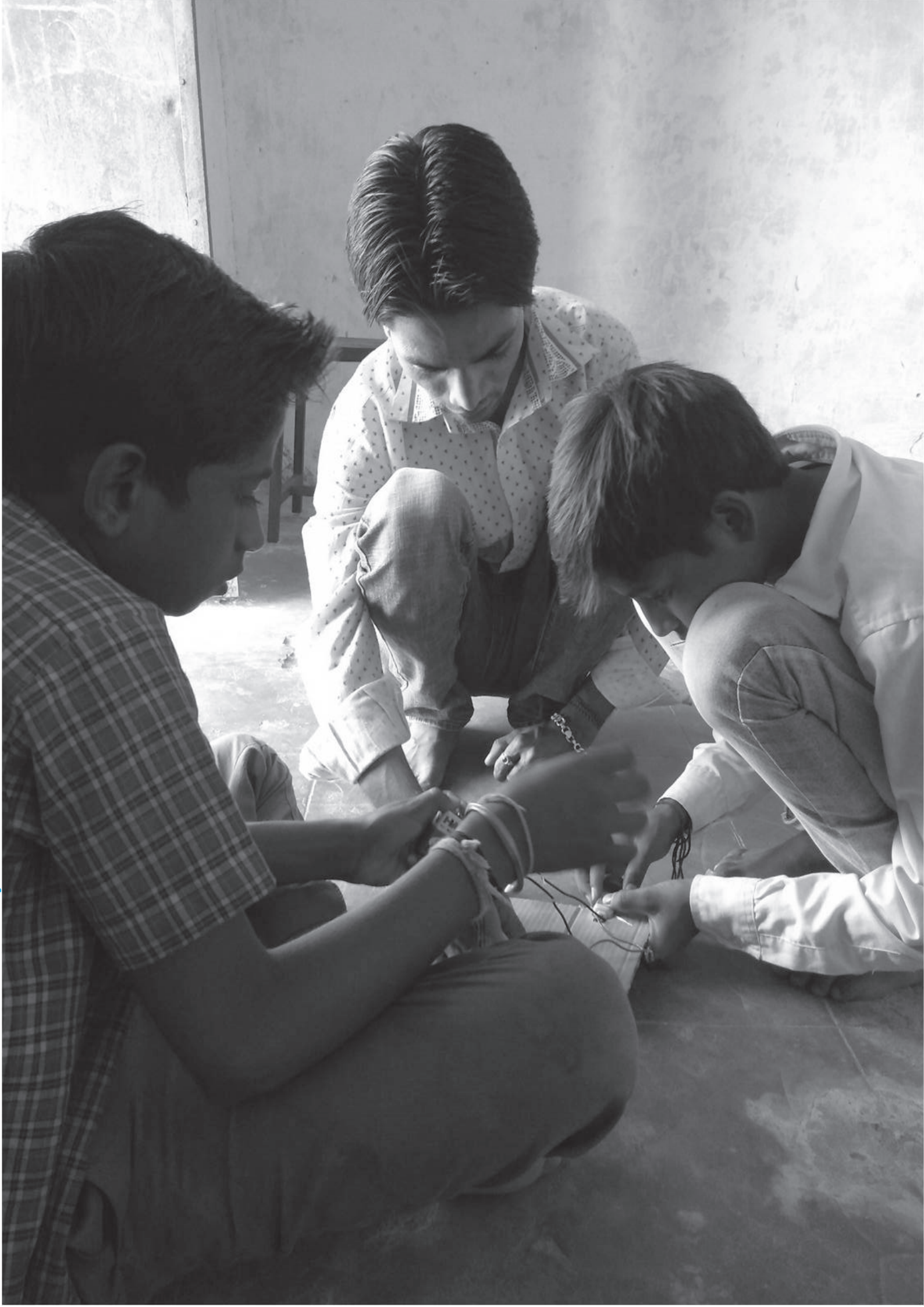
Kshamtalaya believes that it is vital to ensure that a child is active in order to think, reflect, comment and analyze. It is important for children to participate in activities, make mistakes and learn from them. The primary objective of the Learning Festival is to demonstrate a learner centric model that is truly relevant and meaningful to children and their local communities. It believes every child has creative potential that must be harnessed and their creative confidence built.

Learning Festivals are a 6-10 day event which are organized in schools/communities where the participants are introduced to newer mediums of learning through studios like music, art, dance, puppetry, theatre, toy making, stitching, cooking, electronics. It is a demonstration of an open learning environment where the child is free to choose what s(he) wants to learn and the ways in which s(he) wants to learn.

Nayavaas is a small village located about 15 kms from the town of Kotra. The settlement is relatively small and the houses are scattered at a fair distance from each other. Normally the village has a quiet, deserted air but it came alive during the learning festival that took place in its local school. The children and the community members were in full attendance at multiple studios. The Electronics and Electricals studio offered at the school aimed at exposing the children to the functioning of basic gadgets and how they could be simplified and re-purposed to match the needs of the children/community.

The demand for this studio was so high that the unprecedented attendance led to a shortage of resources. The learners were obligated to share basic resources like motors, switches, bulbs. It was inspiring to see how innovative and resourceful the children were - Dilip and Vikas used some basic material like cardboard, a motor, one switch and a couple of batteries. With the help of some bottle caps and rubber bands, they succeeded in building a car. In the last two or three days of the workshop they understood the functioning of the motor and they decided to experiment with it. Dilip and Vikas not only built the car, but amazingly they even managed to make it move at the flick of a switch.

When children transcend the fears that block their creativity, all sorts of new possibilities emerge. Instead of being paralyzed by the prospect of failure, they see every experience as an opportunity they can learn from. With creative confidence, children act with greater courage and have more persistence in tackling obstacles and building new things.



Children were seen to be thoroughly engaged throughout the LF. They always came before time, helped clean up the premises with the facilitator, organized the studios, participated with enthusiasm and stayed back to help re-organize for the following day. Over the ten days one could see that they were taking charge and beginning to own the LF. They were not waiting around for things to be done for them. They would start even before the studios started. For instance: When one of the facilitators walked in the school, he saw that children had already tied the volleyball net, cleaned the ground and were also practicing the early morning drills that was a routine in the Sports & Fitness studio.

LF across 12 villages clearly harnessed the unbridled enthusiasm of children who were eager to come and learn every single day of the festival. Evidently, as adult facilitators, we now need to adapt our ways of teaching-learning to how children learn. Taking ownership of one's learning is a longer process. LF was able to demonstrate that this was imminently possible with the children in Gogunda and Kotra.

Children were seen pushing their own boundaries, stepping out of their comfort zones and trying to attempt activities they had never thought of before. LF encourages a lot of play and playfulness in all its activities. The games played are collaborative and not competitive. The atmosphere is of working together and with joy. This puts children at ease from the very beginning. For instance: In the theatre studio, the facilitator had to create an environment where the children were comfortable to express themselves. It included a lot of theatre exercises in the form of group games. Children were having a lot of fun while involving themselves in the games and were exposed to new activities of voice modulations, facial expressions, body flexibility by imitating animals – all these visibly helped in letting go of inhibitions within themselves.

LF clearly goes to show that on creating a safe space for children to explore - where they feel non-judged, not threatened or assessed - the possibilities of what children do and try are infinite. They bring curiosity, thinking, positive behaviour, enthusiasm and action all at once, as if they were brimming over with joy.

Children were seen coming back to the festival venue where the facilitators were staying overnight during the week of the festival. They were bringing in food and other essentials for the facilitators. The children wanted to spend time with facilitators even after the festival closed for the day. They would take walks with them, take them to visit their homes or even stay back in the schools with them. For instance: In Nayawas of Kotra Block, the children invited the fellows to their home, a good 5 kilometer trek. The fellows were truly touched by the sumptuous meal and the hospitality offered. The children very thoughtfully volunteered to accompany the fellows back as it had become late.

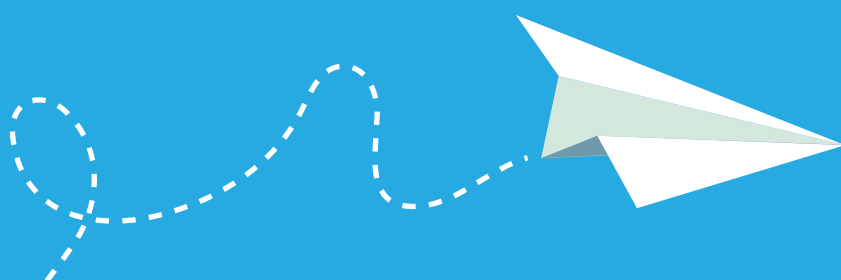
Creating Safe Spaces is not limited to the studio or the festival but extends to the relationship between the child and the facilitator. The LF also believes in creating and fostering new friendships, this being the friendships that the facilitators created with the children and vice versa. This relationship built creates a conducive environment for immense possibilities to engage with the learner, where both the facilitator and the child learn together.

We organized a LF 15 kms from the town of Kotra, in Koliya. Most of the houses are 2-3 kms apart and a fair bit of walking is needed to access them. The closest community from the school is a good 5-6 kms away and children walk to school every day. The facilitator who is placed in the school here was of the opinion that the children of Koliya were shy in nature, less expressive and had suppressive body language.

And this was clearly visible in the first few Puppetry and Storytelling studio sessions. The participants learnt the art of making puppets but also tried narrating stories using these puppets. Often the puppet is just a prop for the performer (the children in this case) to share what's on their mind. One of the participants was a quiet, young girl called Seema. She barely spoke during the studios or even in school. During our icebreakers at the beginning of the event, she only expressed herself through her shy smiles.

The days went by and on the 4th Day of the festival, the children were asked to create a puppet, base a story around it and then narrate the same to the group. Seema after creating her puppet started using the same to converse with everyone including me. She used a stick puppet to express and communicate to the best of their ability. The smile on her face and the joy that she must have experienced was infectious. Her puppet was not limited to the studio space itself but also used it as her medium to communicate outside the studio over the next few days.

A puppet looks like a human being. It seems an excellent medium for projection. Projection is attaching one's feelings and/or actions to another person or object. The puppet creator or puppeteer endows the puppet with characteristics that reflect his or her inner view of human nature, self and others. Because the puppet is an inanimate object, it is considered a safe avenue for expression. It is responsible for all of the views and emotions it communicates, not the puppeteer. Using puppets to create stories initiated an avenue for both the facilitator and the child to use it as a form to break away from inhibitions of speech and expression. The puppet acted as a medium for the child to articulate her feeling, building her confidence in speaking her thought out.







| Impact on Youth

In order to prepare the young cadre to work in the grassroots, they were part of an experiential workshop of the LF before they implemented the same on the field. The experience was relevant, impactful and instilled confidence in the facilitators. They also went on to create their own manuals of facilitating the Learning Studios. They learnt new ways of facilitating learning for children and were now able to visualize the same with mediums of their choice. For instance: A facilitator who first experienced the art & craft studio went ahead and created a manual for stitching and embroidery, which went on to become one of the most sought after studios with children and the community too. She was able to apply the same framework onto the stitching studio, using the same principles - learning by doing, playfulness, creating curiosity and sense of awe and inspiration.

The LF experience was stimulating for facilitators to understand the goals of learning and helped them apply the same onto mediums they wanted to adopt. The experiential methodology has helped in building their confidence to facilitate learning with children. They were able to translate their experience by visualizing the needs of the children and their specific contexts.

With an immersion in the community for 10 days during the course of the Learning Festival, the facilitators got an opportunity to be involved in the daily lives of the children and their families. Post the day's schedule of the festival, which was for about 4 hours till noon, children stayed back at the venue with the facilitators. They participated in many informal festival processes/spaces – be it cleaning or de-brief. The time spent in the evenings singing songs, dancing, having conversations with the children's families, dinner with the community played a major role in building close-knit relationships. It created a two-way process of learning, where facilitators learnt many new things about and from the children and their environment, helping them better understand their context. For instance: in Khajuria LF, they worked on the farms for a few days, went for long walks up the hills, swimming with the children and sharing meals with the children in their homes. The facilitators got an insight into the routine of their daily lives; while conversations with family members gave them an understanding of their cultural practices and customs e.g. wedding ceremonies, the local mela or celebrations and their relationship with the government school.

A model of LF that was implemented encouraging the facilitators to live in the community from the beginning of the festival till the end, helped in building context and alignment to the work done in schools. One of the most important goals of LF was to establish the importance of learning within the community so that they support schools as learning spaces that will eventually better their children's lives. These community visits and engagement were significant in initialising dialogues with the local communities.

Koliya, is a picturesque village of Kotra Block, Udaipur district with pathways that are well connected to the scattered community from which more than 100 children come to the government primary school every day. The parents of the children are mostly migrant laborers and during the summer break they even send their 15 year olds to the nearest big towns like Mount Abu or Udaipur to engage in the same. The summer also provides another opportunity for the families to earn some extra income. This is the time when their children as young as 5 or 6 years of age go into the forest to collect the tendu leaves or the leaves of Indian Ebony to be sold off for making beedis, their local cigarettes. This is one of the main reasons that children miss out on coming to school in the month of May.

“The children are very shy and they hardly talk”, were the first impressions that the facilitator carried when he joined the Koliya school. The facilitator is placed in this school as an iDISCOVER fellow in the school since the month of December 2017. The fellowship was launched by Kshamtalaya to re-imagine learning spaces in communities by placing young people in government schools to work in the grassroots of the education sector. The question in the facilitator’s mind was - what is it about the school that makes children want to stay away from it?

The interventions of the government related to inputs in the form of infrastructure like school buildings, a centralized system of curriculum, mid-day meals, and to some extent providing teachers is not adding up to making the space inspiring enough for children to engage in learning. The centralized system of curriculum poses a challenge to connect children to the environment they live in to another one which is alien to them. This does not engage the children and thus they go to places where they can relate to more. Kshamtalaya through its Learning Festivals wishes to create child-centric spaces of learning. It demonstrates through various learning practices in a safe space where a child’s inner potential can be unlocked and enables them to build confidence to act upon it.

In the Koliya Learning Festival, the facilitator who conducted the theatre studio decided to take the children out to the farmland. The children took the lead and directed him to a place, which everyone was happy with. A vast expanse to run around, lots of stones, leaves and mud to play with. The place was a perfect setting for the actors. The facilitator started the session with a lot of games and also narrated a story about a dog through role playing. “Children love to act, they love imitating animals and they use such thoughtful dialogues while acting. They are learning sentence construction, they get corrected on grammar by their peers and they reach out to me when they are stuck and are in doubt.” The theatre studio’s facilitator recalled from the Learning Festival days at his school.

The theatre studio in the Learning Festival creates a way for children to express emotions through language, symbols and bodily movements. The children are also encouraged to use props that can aid them in the process. Props push them to see their everyday objects differently. An approach that the facilitator adopted to experience the environment within and outside the school too. “There are a lot of things available outside that children can use to portray their stories. And one such story was enacted by the Baadal group in the Learning Festival which left me speechless”, said the facilitator.

To help children get started, they were given simple panchatantra stories. Culturally, the children have an exposure to theatre performances, as they witness “gavri” performances, a nomadic group who travel and use satire to narrate stories in the region. The Baadal group took The Lion and the Well, a story where the lion falls prey to believing that his reflection in the water is not him but a stronger lion who is waiting to fight him. Savaaram, Kamal and Vikram of of class 3 and 4 were the actors and the farm was their stage. They were rummaging through the farm and found their props within minutes. Leaves attached as ears, an old ragged cloth turned into the lion’s mane and two other children dug a hole big enough for tiny Kamal to fall into the well. The facilitator recalls the intensity that Kamal brought to his role through voice modulation and controlling his face muscles to look like an angry lion. The boys showed a true example of complementing a group process and beautifully built on each other’s ideas. The facilitator who is placed in Koliya school now feels that the Learning Festival was able to break the barriers between him and the children. The children remember the mela or the festival even today and are eagerly waiting for the next one.

We believe that children have the ability and immense potential to be creative. They are natural learners and are continuously making sense of the environment around them by exploring, investigating, thinking, playing and asking questions. Through the Learning Festival, we create a safe space for children to do all these and more. The facilitators play a key role in making the environment conducive for them. Giving the children the opportunity to ideate, discuss and create, working in groups or individual activity all creates the right environment and most importantly helps them build the courage to act on those ideas. It builds their creative confidence.





Impact on Teachers and Schools

A period of 6 days of LF consists of children engaging themselves in learning studios of their choice which takes them from exposure to various mediums of learning, choosing one and diving deep for three to four days in learning more about the chosen medium. On the last day of the festival, the children display their work of art, performances of dance and theatre to the visitors – parents, local leaders such as Sarpanch and the youth of the community. With facilitators involved completely in the activities of the festival, the teachers too joined in on the last day and helped the children get ready for the performances. We noticed one of the teachers who was involved in preparing the dance team; she was busy tying the safa (turban), applying make-up on the girls' faces and tying the dhotis for the little boys who were all set to perform the folk dance of ghumar. She was completely immersed in her role and clearly enjoying it. She encouraged the children to dance with joy and instructed them on expression, co-ordination and the optimum usage of the stage space. The children were comfortable around her and listened attentively to her.

The LF aims to take teachers along the journey of building the significance of learning in children's lives. The processes in LF are designed in a way that brings the teachers and children together towards the common goal. In this process of learning together, the teacher and children will build a bond that is filled with love, care and trust. A relationship where they value and respect each other.

“If a child cannot learn
in the way we teach,
we must teach in a way
that the child can learn”



Rujiakhuna is a community located 4 kms from Bikarni, the headquarters of one of the 31 panchayats of Kotra. It is home to the Garasiya community and there are approximately 70 houses scattered all across the settlement. If one were to travel from Bikarni to Rujiakhuna, you would be surrounded by hills on all sides and children can be seen climbing trees, working in the fields or waving out to you. The main occupation of the residents is agriculture and it is entirely seasonal. Being dependent on the rain fed river for irrigation of their fields, the farmers of this area have it particularly tough. Children from these families don't go to school regularly because they are needed to work in the fields to support their parents. The school in Rujiakhuna caters to 320 children out of which 200 children are from the native community. So during times of the harvest or any other critical agricultural activity period the school is deserted. The children therefore lag behind in terms of learning outcomes, firstly because of the prevailing socio economic condition and secondly due to the lack of learner centered approaches in schools.

To address these issues, Kshamtalaya aims at creating learning ecosystems where the learner is at the center and the system offers her/him a variety of mediums to choose from; and the community is a co-creator and co-voyager of the learning process. The schools being the formal and conventional learning spaces for the children and communities, are often not tuned into the needs/context of the child or the community that they belong to. The government's symptomatic addressing of the issue (voluntary teachers, basic infrastructure, mid-day meal programs) may be enough to enroll children but it may not ensure sustained interest or motivation to learn.

Through Learning Festivals, we aim at creating an environment where the children can freely express themselves, become self-aware, choose what they want to learn, hold independent thoughts and essentially learn to be self-reliant. The days are designed in a progression where the learners receive exposure to various mediums of learning, advancing to helping the learner choose a medium that s(he) mostly relates to. The learner then enriches her/his choice by investigating, doing and applying it in everyday life situations, under the guidance of a facilitator. The event closes by creating a common platform for collaboration between various stakeholders like parents, teachers, principals and local authorities, who come together, see, participate and get involved in the child's learning.

Given below is an excerpt from a facilitator's diary –

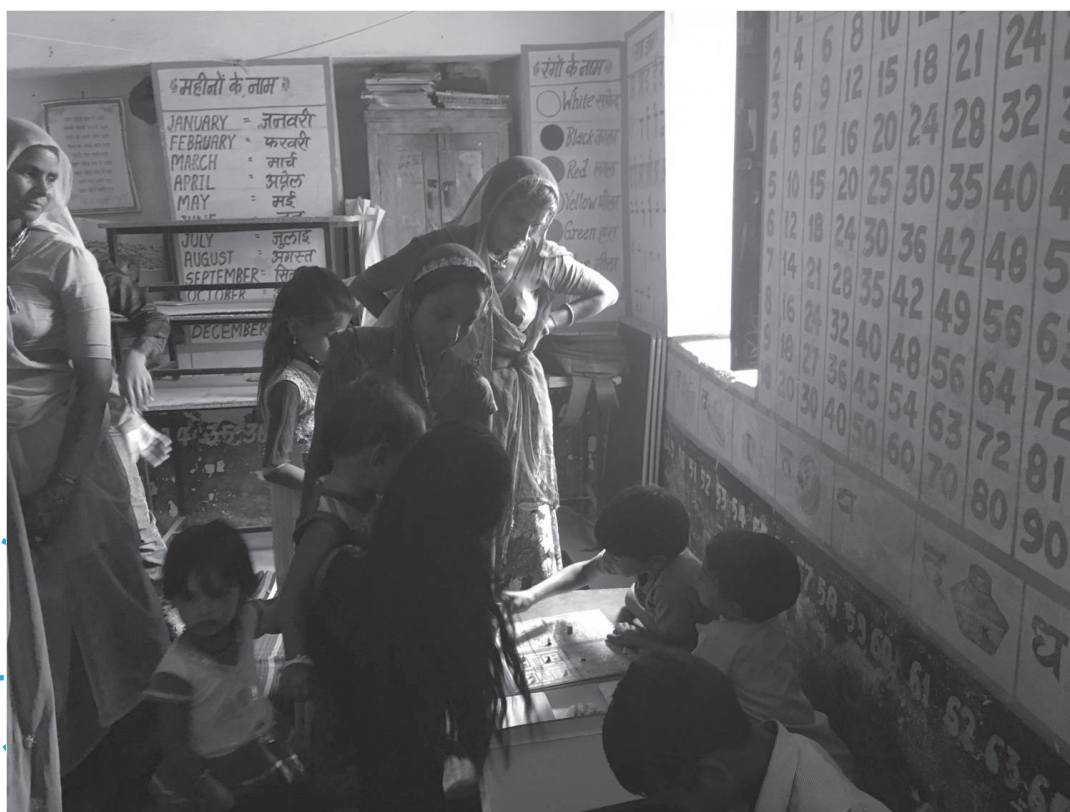
This was my first visit to the school in Rujiakhuna after the conclusion of the Learning festival. The children were in high spirits and gave me a warm welcome. I was greeted with handshakes, hugs and a few children even climbing on to my back, such was the excitement! I met the teacher, Virender Sir, who was equally sincere in his reception; we sat down to have an interesting conversation. He was all praise of the festival and said *"Sabse pehle mein aapka aabhaari hoon. Itna shaandaar mela hua school mein. In bacchon ko aise mahol saal bhar chahiye school mein. Aur mein poora koshish karoonga is school ko aise banaane ke liye."* (First of all, I am grateful to you. How beautiful was the mela that was organized in the school? A similar environment should be present all through the year for the children. And I will try my best to recreate this kind of an environment). He also spoke of how Raju, a child who dropped out after his 1st Grade and never came back to school, despite repeated attempts by the teacher *"Sir, is mele ke mukaanthar, Raju vaapas aaya school ko. Aur agar is mele se dropout bacchon ko hum school laa sakte hain, toh saal ke shuru-aath mein humein learning festival karna chahiye"*. (Sir, through this mela, Raju came back to school. And through this mela, if dropout children can be brought back to school, then we must organize a learning festival at the start of every academic year).

The morning bell for the assembly rang and all the children assembled at the ground. Virender Sir started the day with a few games with the children, which had never happened before at the school. He also included games and activities in his classroom to make it more interactive and engaging for the children.

Kshamtalaya, through its learning festivals wants to bring about a school transformation by closely working with the teachers in impacting learning practices and processes in their classrooms. Because of the exposure received during the festivals, teachers like Virender Sir are looking to transform the classroom spaces, making them interesting and engaging for the children. We can hope to see many more Rajus not just return to school, but also remain in school and receive the education that they deserve.

The Learning Studios in the LF are designed based on processes which are experiential and makes for a curious learner. This method of learning is highly engaging for the children, as it creates a safe space and is child-centric. One of the aims of the festival is to demonstrate that such a method helps the teachers to re-imagine and re-create learning processes in schools. The studio spaces allowed teachers to participate in the sessions along with the children, and an opportunity to co-facilitate. In one school for instance, after being a spectator for two days, the teacher Babulal sir finally sat himself down in the art studio. He chose his colours carefully, clearly enjoying the process, dipping the drawing paper in the tray, he watched in awe at the marble painting that he had just created. Soon Babulal sir had gathered 3 children around him and was cheerfully guiding them in the technique that he had just learnt.

The LF aims to establish the significance of child-centred approach to learning within the teachers who play an important role in shaping the child's future. Working with teachers by demonstrating the practices of child-centric model the LF allowed them to explore and see for themselves how it creates an enabling environment for children to learn. This experience even translated into actions with small steps taken by the teachers, from volunteering to co-facilitating in the studio. In the future we aim to create experiential sessions for teachers so that they are fully equipped to set up an entire LF on their own.



Government Higher Secondary school Dadiya, located in the Gogunda Block was next in line for the streams of Learning Festivals. The festival is an event, led by a team of facilitators who are on a voyage of learning to enable a fertile ground for children to grow with an innate need to learn and also work in collaboration with the primary stakeholders of child's learning, mainly the teachers, parents and the community members. The school has a space for children to play team games, there are classrooms for each class and it was ideal for the Learning Festival team to set up their camp. Dadiya school is located well in the purview of the community that is slowly seeing more number of pacca houses coming, home to 120 households.

Working with the teachers has mostly been challenging for the facilitators. Teachers take time to accept the fellows as a co-learner. In their time spent in the school, they mostly avoid planning sessions, being present in de-briefs and some of them did not participate in the processes of the Learning Festival. When it comes to classroom, the concern lies in the mindset of resorting to a one-way approach to teaching, guided by a fixed resource which is the curriculum and preparing the children to pass examinations rather than building their potential to life-preparedness. This cannot be completely taken upon the teachers, for they may have been exposed to the newer techniques in training sessions held often but there seems to be a gap of visualizing or practicing the techniques on the ground.

As a pre-process to the program, the facilitators conducted a primary research where they each spoke to 3 teachers on what should school be like? Of the 69 teachers that they spoke to every-one mentioned about how children should play and do activities like drawing and craft. There was a gap between what the teachers were saying and what was actually taking place in the schools.

Through the Learning Festivals, a different approach to facilitating learning was demonstrated to the teachers. Various aspects of transforming classrooms into a learner centric space was clearly visible to the teachers. From space designing of the classroom, displaying children's work on the walls of the room, progression from one day to the next, clear tangible output of each day, conducting de-brief with the children and also an everyday de-brief that facilitators participated in sharing their learning through observation with other team members helped teachers understand the practical application of the learner centric model.

In Dadiya school, while the facilitators prepared for the festival, Gandhi sir the mathematics teacher who has been teaching there for 10 years now walked up to one of the facilitators who was to facilitate the Sports & Fitness studio through Kho-Kho and Volleyball, and told him that he would join him for the studio. The next day, the facilitator and Gandhi sir cleaned the ground together, tied the volleyball net and waited for the children to come. Both of them discussed the course of the day, how they will introduce the game, what drills do they teach, how can we get children to count the number of jumps in the drill so that they can practice counting numbers. Together they were creating lesson plans. The facilitator immediately wrote all this down in his plan. Gandhi sir sat next to him watching him key into a pre-designed plan where the facilitator had already written down the objectives of the Sports & Fitness studio. He asked Krishna more questions about how did he make this plan, when did he make them and what it's like in the fellowship?

The children soon arrived and were engrossed in the game. Gandhi sir as our facilitator claimed did not sit down even for a minute for the entire 2.5 hours of the studio for the first group. They took a break and were ready for the second group to walk in. The end of the day, Gandhi sir expressed how much he loves to play. He added how today was different from other days. It was not mundane like the days where we come and sit inside the classroom till the last bell. "I think children should play every day. I will play with them too" He said.

With the 1:60 ratio of teacher to student that exists in Dadiya school, the fellowship covers 30 schools in total which has more or less the same scenario. Working with just the children and creating a parallel approach of our own will not help in any way to solve the problems. With the idea of giving space to children to build their creative confidence, through Learning Festivals we want to demonstrate ways in which learning happens inside and outside the classrooms. And this we want to do together with the teachers. Just as we wish to create this opportunity for children, a space and environment helping teachers to think, reflect, do and co-learn with the facilitators will open new doors of avenues for them to work towards betterment of children's lives everywhere. Moving forward, the Learning Festival aims to involve teachers along in the entire process. We also wish to conduct similar experiential training with them to help them visualize learner centric model and apply it in the classrooms leading to a whole school transformation.

The 6 days of LF created an environment of learning, play and collaboration and involved the entire village. Closing on a festive note, it created an atmosphere of creativity, celebration and a sense of purpose for all the participants. The teachers of the school who participated in many processes within the studio were also encouraged by the response from the community on the last day. We are certain that this would inspire them to continue to spread the spirit of creativity and joy throughout the year. We were delighted to learn that after the closure of the Learning Festival in Koliya, a teacher gave an entire classroom to the fellow to turn it into a learner-centric space. He said that children should be able to do what they did in the festival every day – ideate, investigate, create and present their ideas to everyone who comes into school. This he said will instill confidence in the children.

This was the impact that the LF model had on the teachers. Providing dedicated spaces within schools or in the local community for child-focused learning will create opportunities for a learner to explore the potential that exists within. This is just the first step towards the transformation of the entire school that will re-imagine how learning unfolds in schools.





| Impact on the Community and Local Governance

The LF design incorporated an approach that involved all the primary stakeholders of children's learning. During the days of the festival, community members were seen coming to the festival to drop their children at the venue and take part in the studios during the day. It needs to be shared that the timing of the festival overlapped with the school holidays, a time when conventionally the rural children support their families with additional income. It was heartwarming to see that the parents regardless ensured that the children attended school, thereby demonstrating their faith in the learning opportunities that were being provided through the festival. In the Khajuriya LF, parents accompanied their children to the Atal Seva Kendra, a local community space every day. They also spent some time in the studios learning and watching their children learn.

Kshamtalaya believes in creating a platform where collaboration and contribution of all major stakeholders consisting of parents, community members and the local governance is required for any school transformation. Knowing well that we cannot achieve the goal of establishing significance of learning in the community all by ourselves, allowing parents to visit the school often keeps them informed of child's growth and understanding how it will impact their future. This eventually builds ownership of retaining the schools as spaces of learning for them.

1600 children and
their families
reached out to.



Working with approximately 19 GPs and 21 villages, the Learning Festival sought the involvement of the local governance in the process of establishing its significance. We saw instances of the community leaders contributing resources and time for the festival. The Sarpanch of Khajuriya village who was extremely supportive of the Learning Festival, allowed the facilitators to set up the LF in the Atal Seva Kendra, a local community space used for panchayat meetings and Gram Sabha. He even arranged for refreshments for all the people who were present in the festival. He very generously offered the usage of this space for all future activities related to creating such learning opportunities for children.

To establish a significance of learning in children's lives, it is important to set up the processes collaboratively with all the stakeholders in their lives. This helps in creating a community owned agenda of learning which helps in establishing its significance to the parents and youth of the community. All this contributes to nurturing the young ones into becoming productive adults of the village. The LF has begun to involve the local governing bodies to own the agenda of education in their villages.

Located in the interiors of Kotra Block, Tilarva is a community that is disconnected from the arterial highways that connect the major towns and cities. The deeper one goes within the community, one notices the lack of mobile towers, an uncommon occurrence in this day and age. Our facilitator cycles to Tilarva every day from his home in Kotra covering about 30 kilometres to and fro. With a total of 115 children enrolled in the Government primary school of Tilarva, our facilitator also recorded from the household survey that he conducted of 70 houses, that most of the children are first generation school goers. The parents send their children to school in the hope that it will help them access better livelihood options. Talking about the community based innovation that already exists, the situation of the SMC (School Management Committee) meeting is not up to the standards devised by the government. It can be helpful in solving the infrastructure related issues like lack of basic rooms, teacher shortages, under or improper utilization of school funds. We believe that the community knows best when it comes to their needs and requirements; they must also be involved in all development processes.

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The Learning Festival, reaches out to the community through the facilitator who includes and formally invites all members by visiting their homes. A recent inductee of the iDISCOVER fellowship was part of the team in Tilarva that was conducting street theatre with children. In one of the visits, he went to Saviyaram's house, who is a student of Class 7. He was taken aback by the immense creative potential the child possessed. He saw models of bikes and jeep that the child had created to near perfection, using all the waste material available on the roads – match boxes, sticks, cardboards, metal pieces etc. The facilitator recalls, "He could have facilitated a studio of model making for all of us, in the next Learning Festival, Saviyaram can do it." He visited his home every day and in due course of time Saviyaram's family also felt touched by his interest in the child. They invited him to dinner and offered to host him for a few days too. "I am a stranger to them but they still hosted me. I am really touched by their trust and love. We should visit children's homes frequently, and conduct learning sessions in front of the parents. It is a slow process for the community to own the agenda of learning, but it is the only one to make an intervention sustainable. They will protect the space and also work towards its betterment, once they know its significance" the facilitator reminisced.

When the festival came to an end, Saviyaram's father came to school to see children engrossed in getting the place ready for visitors. He met with the other parents who had been invited this mela. He met the sarpanch who had organized refreshments for all the participants of the festival. Saviyaram's father and the facilitator have now become close friends and moving forward the Learning festival can count on the cooperation and active interest of Saviyaram's family.

The festival reached out to 1600 children and more than 600 families that the fellows met through the programme. Slowly the vision of community engagement with the learning processes and their ownership of the spaces and such interventions is taking shape.

Enabling the creation of an inclusive space for parents to meet and collaborate with school leaders where they can contribute positively towards transforming their children into curious, creative and active citizens is critical. To achieve this, the parents were encouraged to contribute towards the organizing effort on the concluding day of the LF that marked the culmination of a week long celebration of learning, playing and creating. They got involved working alongside their children as learners and enablers themselves. In Bikarni, where the young parents of little children helped in decorating the community space, setting up speakers for the community dance, distributing sweets to the two hundred children who made it such a success; the event saw the participation of more than 80 women and men. The children used open spaces to set up all the small projects that they created on their own and proudly shared it with their parents. They even set up game spaces which saw the community's active participation, bringing much joy to the village.

It truly shows that an open space where parents are welcome to see their children's work and what they have learnt will help them to engage with learning in children's lives. The LF shows that by keeping the space accessible-free to walk in at any point of time will lead to deeper impact such as parents themselves owning schools as learning spaces. This will result in all stakeholders working together to make schools a safe and enriching environment for the children.



Parental involvement is an integral part of a successful educational system. Numerous studies have identified parent engagement as a critical factor affecting the success of individual students and the school environment itself. But what today's schools and educational institutions overlook is the fact that high rates of student learning outcomes are generally the result of three groups collaborating to provide the best opportunities for the children—teachers, parents, and the community.

Often times, the onus for providing a well-rounded learning experience for every student falls directly on the shoulders of the school administrators, teachers, faculty, and staff. However, this limited perspective overlooks the fact that much of a child's life and learning occurs outside the classroom. Life away from school is as important as the life in school. This is why community engagement and involvement in schools is such an important facet of the learning process of the children.

Kshamtalaya's Learning Festivals are objectively working to establish significance of learning for local communities and local government institutions by involving them in all processes and together building a community owned agenda of learning.

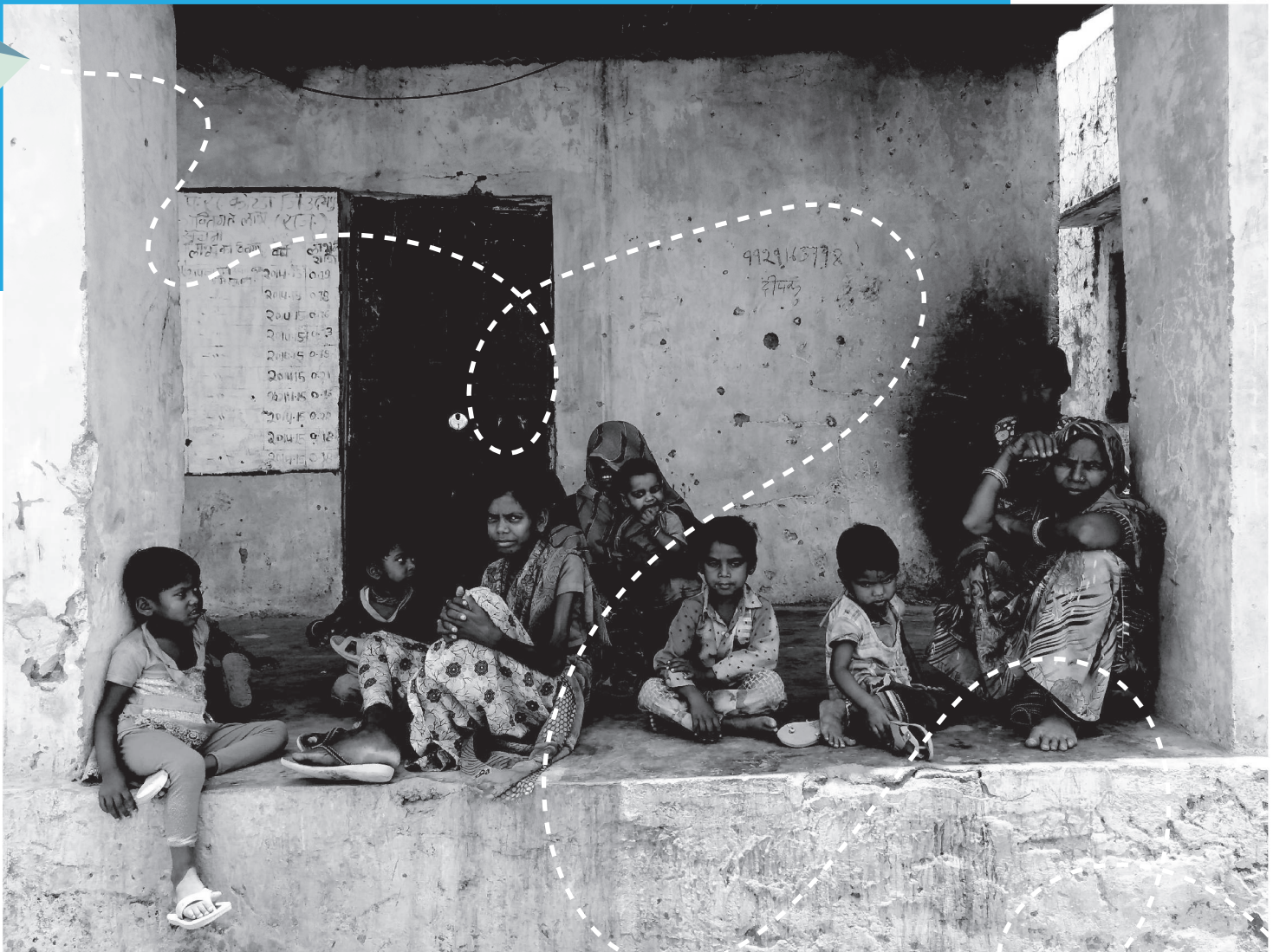
Khajuriya village is located 20 kms from the town of Kotra and our experience of working with the community has been remarkable. Its Atal Seva Kendra, a center for delivery of essential public services was the venue of the Learning Festival. It was decorated with colourful sarees, dupattas, swaying to the breeze blowing from across the Aravalli ranges and over the Sabarmati river. Children danced to the tunes of popular Gujarati music while some of them were stitching bags, caps; others were painting with salt, sand and other locally available material. Closer to the river, some children were busy enacting a play that they scripted and directed by themselves.

All this had become possible because of the open learning environment, which is at the heart of the Learning festival. It gave the children space to express themselves through diverse, creative mediums. Families joined in the celebrations, parents and siblings all very proud of the efforts put in by their loved ones.

On Day one, the family members witnessed the festival from a safe distance, but remained present during the day. Day two, they were visibly comfortable, and a few members started to participate in some of the games which were played each morning. By Day three all inhibitions fell away and the community came together as it was meant to. The facilitators staying at the venue had a pleasant surprise waiting for them when they came back from their customary morning dip in the river. The hall of the Kendra was filled with children and their family members.

The community members had taken charge and were instructing the children to sit in place. Attracted by the general excitement and the buzz, one of the Anganwadi workers had brought her children to the festival. After starting the day with games, the participants headed to their respective studios of interest. The community members also became a part of the studios which they found interesting and wanted to know more about.

They also joined in with their children, exploring and experimenting and helping with their knowledge of the usage of material and resources. Once the activities were completed they reminded the children to keep the resources back in place, some of them also demonstrating the same. The Community members came back the next day and the day after, as did the Anganwadi team – and everyone stayed till the very end of the event.





| Challenges

Key to the success of the LF's were the 30 facilitators who are on the iDISCOVER fellowship program. This group of young people belong to the local communities of Kotra and Gogunda as well as parts of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. The fellowship offers a unique hands-on experience of working in education at the grass roots. During the tenure of the fellowship and the LF experiential training sessions, many of the facilitators had the opportunity to challenge their beliefs and often unlearn their own ways of thinking. Beliefs like - resorting to corporal punishment as a strategy of classroom management. In the course of our discussions, they all narrated memories from their school days and shared that their learnings could be attributed to the teacher's strict teaching methods. Experiencing sessions on creating safe spaces, the group started to move away from this belief and conceded that children learn best when they feel safe and secure as opposed to feeling threatened. After all education cannot be simply viewed from the 'course work' or 'portion' lens; there is learning from the psychological, sociological and economic perspectives. Also the process of learning, what facilitates it – how do children learn, were some of the concerns that we pondered upon. Apart from these pedagogical and classroom management challenges, there were also other issues where they found it difficult to work collaboratively, while remaining preoccupied with the success of their own studios and being overly dependent on resources.

Working with these young facilitators has been challenging for Kshamtalaya as an organization. We began with a dialogue on creating safe spaces for children, to create inspiring spaces, to question rather than provide answers when children are facing a problem, sensitizing them towards the needs of the children, teachers and the community. It is imperative for the organization to facilitate and nurture them to become grassroots professionals who are effective and open to learning. There is a need to work closely with them to create a cadre who are able to reflect the values of LF and who are aware and confident of their inner potential, seeing themselves in the context of others, and lending them a perspective to understand the education sector.

Kshamtalaya envisions that all children will achieve their true potential, which can only happen when all children not just complete schooling but also receive quality education. In a particular community, the caste divisions affected the group dynamics adversely and led to discriminatory attitudes and behavior towards some children. The non-tribal children were not holding hands with the tribal children while playing circle games, they did not want to sit next to them and their presence or absence did not bother them. When the facilitators intervened and urged them to work together, the children would respond with, “our parents do not allow it”. Due to existing cultural norms and prior practices communities refrain from engaging with each other in a respectful and collaborative manner, and not surprisingly children display the same behaviour. Kshamtalaya sees this as a challenge because children do not discriminate or intend to create such disparities; they inherently want to play and spend time with everyone. With time, the team did see them engaged in play, but sadly when they returned to the studio, they would refuse to sit next to the tribal children or work with them.

The LF is meant to be a safe space for all learners. This means that it is a non-threatening environment and is not fearful for all learners who are there to learn. A safe environment portrays inclusivity, being appreciated, encouraged, valued and respected as human beings. Addressing these challenges through dialogue and building relationship with the children will direct us to create such safe spaces together.

The involvement of teachers is vital for the LF, as they are the key to any transformation on the systemic level. Further any sustainable change in the learning space cannot occur without their participation and collaboration. The educators and administrators are as much a part of the system as the learners, in fact they are just as critical because they also happen to be viewed as role models. However, since the LFs were scheduled to take place during the school holidays we succeeded in involving the teachers in only 6 out of 12 schools. Nevertheless, all those who were party to the process shared that the children seemed to be enjoying themselves and that it was important to engage in art, play and collaborative work every day. One teacher (from Koliya) offered the team the use of a classroom that could be converted into a learner-centric space on the lines of a learning studio.

The LF intends to demonstrate learning practices to the teachers who can together with the facilitators bring in whole school transformation. Kshamtalaya as an organization should necessarily plan the implementation of the festivals by keeping the school in mind. It can go hand-in-hand with the school's 'praveshtsav' (enrolment drive) and the first month after the school reopens as that's the month where children do not go to school as they are involved in earning extra income for their homes. It has been our learning to actively engage with teachers who are an integral part of the LF and their

participation and engagement is necessary to re-imagine these schools as learning spaces.

One key learning from the initiative was that concerted planning and additional effort is needed to integrate community members. Although the facilitators conducted a primary research and made home visits, they did not involve the community intensively in the planning and implementation of the LF. If one truly wishes to underline the significance of learning in children's lives, then the parents, local governance and the members of the community will have to play a more prominent role. Ownership of such initiatives will only come once we create the environment for co-creation and collaborative work. In some communities, parents did not turn up to see the LF in their nearby government school. Going forward, the organization needs to minimize this and take necessary steps at the design /planning stage so as to involve them from the very beginning and inspire them to our co- creators and co -learners in the journey.

The LF aims to establish a significance of learning in children's lives to the community members and the local governance. This requires a constant interaction, planning and building a relationship with the parents of the children. This is important because we need to create a supportive environment for children to learn and all the stakeholders have to invest in doing so. This was a moment of reflection for all of the team as to what processes and interventions should be adopted that will create a meaningful engagement such as participating in the School Management Committees and the local governing bodies' meetings and collaborating on transforming school spaces together.



| Future Direction

The LF initiative that was celebrated in 12 schools of Kotra and Gogunda block near Udaipur in southern Rajasthan, underscored Kshamtalaya's belief that no ground level program in education can be successful without engaging all the primary stakeholders. It is imperative to engage with all the key influencers in a child's life – the parents, teachers, local governance and the community. Working in isolation will only lead to parallel systems and further alienation of local communities from their children's education. Instead, co-creating these approaches towards the same goal – a quality education for all our children which is free, accessible and is taking place in safe spaces, with all the collaborators will build an ownership towards school spaces and ensure its longevity and health.

Moving ahead, the organization would like to increase the outreach of the Learning Festivals to a greater number of schools within Rajasthan, Delhi and Karnataka. The experience also emphasized the need for a Learning Center, which is a continual approach to establishing the significance of learning within the communities. The center acts as a support system to strengthen the potential of the child through a diversity of mediums of learning that it offers. It is a shared space for the various stakeholders involved in the child's life to come together and be a part of her learning processes after school every day.



Acknowledgement

“When eating a fruit,
think of the person who
planted the tree.”

- A Vietnamese Proverb

Jatan Sansthan & Kshamtalaya Foundation owe many thanks for the success of the amazingly fun and successful Learning Festivals organized in Kotra & Gogunda during the months of April - May 2018.

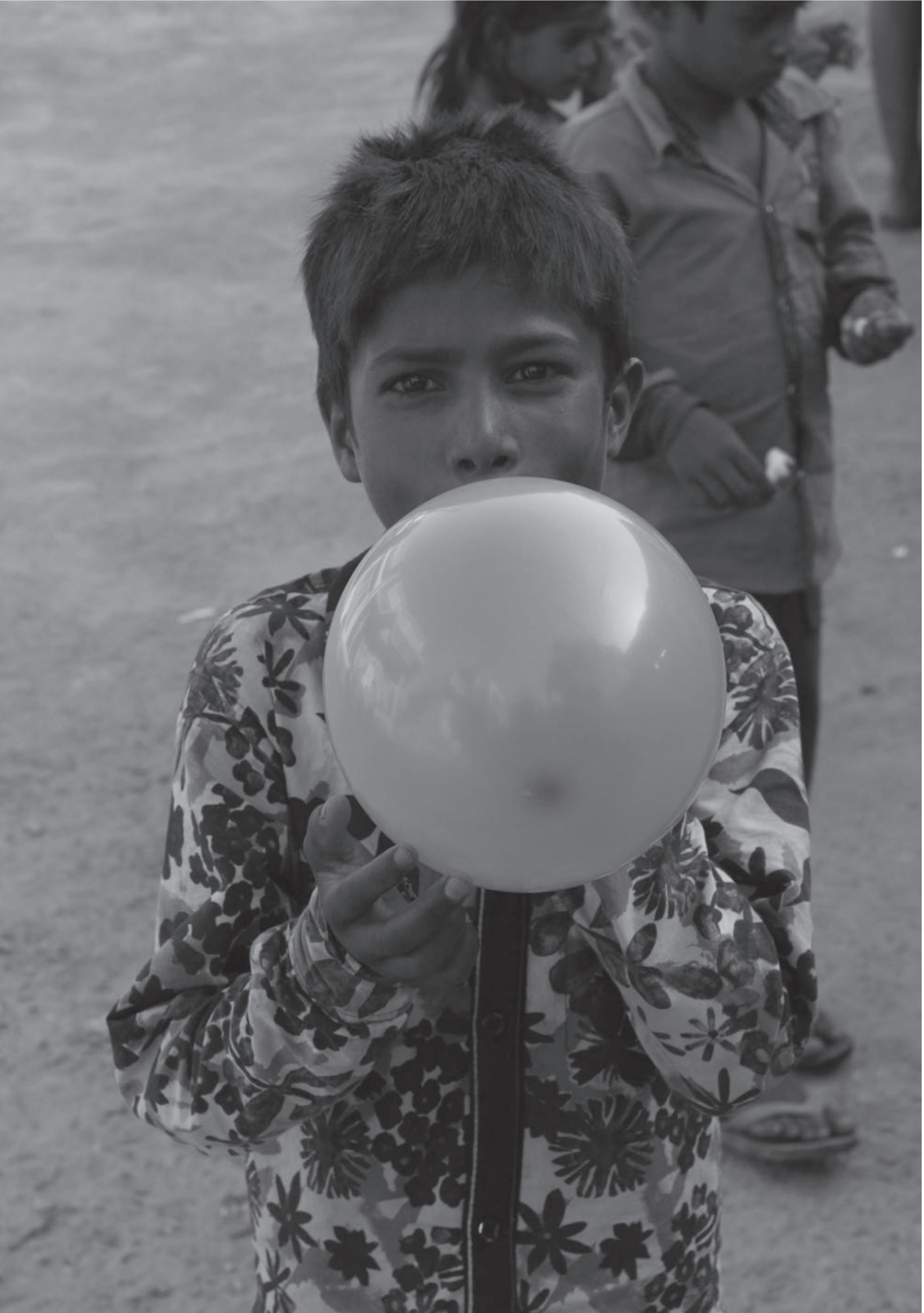
Without nurturing and care, it is a huge challenge for a seed to grow into a tree. Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to NSE Foundation for their love, care and support in making it possible to organize 12 festivals across 13 Gram Panchayats.

We wholeheartedly thank the panchayats, the partner schools, teachers and the community members of Kotra & Gogunda for their love and support throughout the festivals.

Kshamtalaya also thanks its iDiscover Fellows who were the soul of the festivals. Without whom, it would not have been possible to reach out to 1600 children.

We look forward to continuing this journey of helping children realize their true potential by ensuring that they attain quality education.

THANK YOU!



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