



kshamtalaya

Learning Festivals 2019-20



RAJASTHAN





Is Quality Education a distant dream?

As a systematic process, the children of our nation are assessed for their academic abilities through the year. They are assessed for their ability to remember, their pace at writing & their skills at duplicating. Does this sound similar to an experience that you have lived with? Does a report card show - The number of times we took initiative to co-organize the school's annual day program where you led an entire dance crew? The number of times we expressed to the teacher what we loved about *The Tempest* or *The Road Not Taken* and how that laid bricks to our future choices of subjects? The number of times we helped a friend during our school lunch or during the games period?



We, as educators are responsible for a child's holistic growth. Schools as learning spaces are becoming obsolete in shaping a child's personality. However, this can be re-thought of and these spaces can and should turn into places that build and enrich children's potential. We dream of a school where children's report cards show the number of instances, a child has - taken initiative, displayed teamwork, asked questions and expressed themselves. This would make it possible for teachers, parents, and the local governance to identify early influencers and nurture the child's potential. We dream of a school to which children feel happy and excited to go to every day – a safe haven.

*“Children must be taught how to think,
not what to think.”*

- Margaret Mead, Cultural Anthropologist



The Organisation

Kshamtalaya Foundation, a not for profit organization is committed to re-imagining educational structure and practices within local communities. We realize that the current education system and their circumstances, have rendered a lot of classroom learning obsolete and irrelevant. The work that we propose is aimed at establishing the significance of learning in the lives of children and the community owning this agenda of learning. Through the Learning Festivals (LFs) we hope to co-create spaces within schools and local communities that encourage children and youth to become self - directed and life-long learners.

The LFs are a way to demonstrate a revival of the spirit of learning for schools and the local communities. The vision is to build environments that facilitate ‘Joy of Learning’, that allow children to assimilate and reinforce positive ways of learning. The festival is a medium through which we aim to begin a dialogue on what a child needs best for her learning potential to be achieved. This is our effort to co-create a democratic learning system within schools. This is not merely a state of events but a call for action – a child’s learning is the responsibility of both the school and teachers alike. We need to come together to find ways of creating meaning and purpose in education.



The Learning Festival

The Learning Festivals are carefully planned on the foundation of our core principles -

Freedom with Responsibility

We believe that Freedom is a birth right of all individuals alive and is integral in shaping one's personality. As individuals, we must try new things, push our boundaries & express ourselves freely, and this builds our character. We also believe that this freedom or being at our own will comes with a package to be accountable for.

Collaboration

It is an integral value that stems from the idea that we are interdependent. Collaboration leverages the interdependence of each other. In the LFs, this is a fundamental beginning - involving the parents, teachers and the governance in an attempt to reimagine learning within communities and schools.

Safe Space

We strongly stand-by creating a space filled with love, compassion, trust, kindness & patience. A safe space is the most fundamental aspect of this relationship. We believe that a safe space that is bereft of all forms of physical, verbal, emotional abuse is absolute for children's holistic growth.

Joyful Learning

The environment in a learning space should uphold the value of learning with happiness, encouragement and fun. This motivates children to come to school with a purpose to learn.

THE
REACH

26

Learning
Festivals

26

Schools

2

Learning
centers

ENGAGEMENT

2153

Children

95

Out-of-school
children

FACILITATORS

30

Kshamtalaya

24

Kalyani &
Chetna Arogya Mandir



Kshamta Utsav

Kshamta-Utsav is a capability training of fellows where they get trained to lead LFs. The training is designed carefully so that the participants are able to build a personal connection to what they are about to do. The experience is usually acquired where the participants too understand what it means to create, question and work together in a team. In short, the Kshamta-Utsav is a learning festival for the facilitators themselves!

The core idea behind this format was to understand our relationship with the space that we live in, the people we live with and the understanding of "ownership".

The output of the training was a true standing evidence of working as a team - using the participants' knowledge, pushing each other to try and not give up and finally own the space that we live in as our own. We all celebrated with a new kitchen garden, the office space getting a new and fresh look and products made out of used material that were found in the office. The following are the studios which were set-up:

1. Art & Space Design
2. Ultimate Frisbee
3. Upcycling & Handicraft Making
4. Kitchen Gardening



Summer LFs

The Summer festival spanned across 5 weeks from the last week of April 2019 till the end of May 2019. The fellows, who were divided into three teams, together conducted 13 festivals reaching 13 schools. We were also able to inaugurate the *Panchayat Bhavan* in *Bakhel*, as a space for children to spend time to learn art, craft, yoga & mindfulness. It was titled as *Hikvu Kendra* or Learning Center.

During this festival the fellows also used the opportunity of school holidays to increase their learning time by staying within the school premises for the entire week. This created a space for children to spend longer hours and continue working on their products.

“We learn by doing because we do by learning”

“Yeh School kiska hai?”

Whose School is it?

In the Learning Festival for Problem Solving conducted in the summer of May 2019, the facilitators through the Art & Space Designing Studio went on a journey to understand the school's problems along with the children. Children were observed to share problems such as “no place to sit” and “no play ground to play”.

A total of 15 children were in the studio. There was a girl named *Kali Kumari*. She worked with fellow *Lakshmipriya* in a data collection process where they asked the parents in the village - Who do you think the school belongs to? Options – (A) Government (B) Community (C) Both.

A total of 25 respondents were asked. 24 of them said the school belonged to the government and 1 said that it belonged to both. Kali told Lakshmipriya, "*Didi if they don't think the school is theirs, how will they take care of it?*" It was during this time that the children and the fellow had a conversation on ownership and how it plays a role in taking care of spaces.



Here, let me help you!

“Before we begin, let us discuss how we should work as a team. What are some commitments that we should try and follow?”

These were the agreements of the Red Group -

1. We will help each other.
2. We will ensure to include our group members if they are being quiet or not participating.
3. We will not call each other names.
4. We will throw the waste in the dust bin.

After working on their agreements, the children of the red group had circled around, just about to dive deeper in their world of imagination of colours, animals and things. The facilitator was asking them - “What do we name our group? What makes you smile even on a hot summer's day? What is your favourite thing to do when you have the holidays?”

While the children were busy discussing among each other, one of the facilitators caught three children waiting to come in at the school gate. The minute the facilitator waved at them, they ran in to get a closer look at what was happening in the school. The children registered their names and joined the red group. They were trying to listen to each other, and it was observed that these three children *Chanda, Ramu & Jeeji* were not in their school uniform. “*They don't come to school madam ji*” said one of the students.

We have been pondering around the reasons behind children dropping out or walking out of schools as we prefer to say it. But seeing these children wait at the gate, seeming curious and convinced that today seemed different, today seemed like they would get to learn and have fun, gave us a feeling that they wanted to give this a chance. The red group finally chose a name for themselves and were all busy writing it on their ID cards specially designed for the Learning Festivals. *Chanda* seemed clueless as to what to do with these objects that were not familiar to her - a sketch pen and an empty ID card. *Viru*, her group member said “*Here, let me help you...*” and wrote her name on the card. *Chanda* and her friends experienced the Learning Festival till the last day.



Winter LFs

The festival was organised for two weeks dated from 6th to 11th January 2020 in 6 schools and then from 20th to 26th January 2020 in 5 schools. With a span of two weeks, each school received an input of 5 hours per facilitator which equaled up to 25 hours per school/day and 150 hours per school/week. During these LFs, we recorded observations of any instances that showed children learning joyfully, taking initiative, expressing their imagination, asking questions and whether they showed confidence in expressing themselves. To know our key for recording these behaviors please follow the link <https://bit.ly/AssessFrmwrk>

224

instances of children observed to be learning with joy

155

observations were recorded of children expressing through creative outputs

120

incidents of children seen taking ownership of their space, their group's goals and working towards achieving the same

“Ram, Ram, Hariya Ram!”

Kika Ram is studying in class 3 at the Govt. school in Bekariyawad. *Hariya Ram ji* is his father. When he came into the school he said, “Today my son was very enthusiastic to come to school and told me that its seekhne ka mela. I thought I will join him and spend some time in the school today.” *Hariya Ram ji* spoke to the fellows briefly and saw that they were getting the children in line for registration. He took initiative to participate with the fellows in the process until the registration was complete and handed out the festival tickets to each child with a smiling face, welcoming the children to the festival. *Hariya Ram* stayed the entire day and also paid a visit to all the studios.

We wish to create avenues where the community – parents and well-wishers find ways to feel connected with the school. These actions lead to building a relationship of trust, accountability and building ownership in the communities towards schools.

I get knocked down, but I get up again!

How often are we allowed a safe space to try and fail, again and again until we get up and back again?

Meet *Sona*, a student of the Govt. School in *Chaapar* in Kotra, who was a participant in the Learning Festival conducted in her school. Fellow *Dinesh* was all prepared to take the children on their morning walk to the nearby ground for their warm-up and game time. It was day 3 of the Learning Festival and *Dinesh* got them lined up for their L drill practice session. It is a drill where, every child gets the opportunity to run in a L shaped pathway and try to catch a disc. *Sona* has always taken that run enthusiastically but you would see her with a smile, when she failed to catch the disc – her peers would clap for her and encourage her to keep trying.

One fine day, when *Sona* was taking the run, *Dinesh* said out loud, "You can do it!". The next moment, the flying disc had rested in the girl's hands. "Watching her catch the disc really made me believe in the phrase keep trying till you reach the goal, trying really is the key" said *Dinesh*. When he asked the girl how she felt, she said, "accha laga!". The ultimate frisbee sessions are designed in a way that every child gets the opportunity to give it a shot, to keep trying. We have seen a drastic change in the discipline that children follow during drills and playing the sport too. The LFs are such a space where children feel safe to explore new things and keep trying to learn. We aim to create a compassionate, safe and healthy environment that eliminates - discouraging children, calling them names or not giving them an opportunity to learn.

Shake-a-leg!

One of the most important values of the Learning Festival is to create a joyful learning environment within the schools. The LF theme song that we use to start and end the day with – has truly contributed to build togetherness and eagerness among the participants.

Dingari is a village in the block of *Gogunda*, located 48 kms from the city of *Udaipur*. We included the Govt. school here into the fellowship schools this year and it was the first learning festival. It was a sight to watch the teachers of this school visit all the studios and participate in them too. One teacher named *Modi* sir who attended the Ultimate frisbee studio organized by *Nisha* was able to break down the learning objectives of the activities she facilitated. He expressed that they could be used to build attention skills in children.

The teachers were also found dancing to the LF song and also participate in the energizers that were joined in by the children too.

A joyful environment which is equally enjoyed by children and teachers alike builds a loving atmosphere in the school. The barriers between them visibly reduces and students feel more comfortable in approaching the teachers. A smile goes a long way, and we saw a lot of smiles on that day!



In our two years of fellowship I had not witnessed an LF where 4 teachers of a school were engaged completely in the festival. They co-facilitated in the studios, participated in the debrief and were using the framework we shared to express their day's events. Our highlight was when the teacher Naresh sir facilitated one of the debriefs and came prepared with two questions for the same. The teachers also shared that they feel motivated when the iDiscover Fellows are around. They feel that by sitting together at the end of the day is proving useful for them to be learning from each others' experiences of the day.

- Harish Bumbariya, iDiscover Fellow

The Kshamta-Utsav was one of the best experiences I have had in my life. I am glad that I took the opportunity of being a part of Gogunda's Learning Festivals. Firstly, I want to thank the team for not making me feel like an outsider and taking care of me. Secondly, I realise that working at the grassroots of education helped me in taking a pause and see a different side of the world that I didn't know of. This is a milestone in my life so far.

- Ashvin Solanki, LF Intern

The Learning Festival was truly engaging. I had a great time. Your team is really hard working. They stayed in school and really invested a lot of time and energy in making the classrooms colourful and meaningful for children. All the teachers were completely engaged. The last day was the best, we all joined in celebrating learning!

- Ashok Sir, Govt. Sr. Sc. School, Jhed (Kotra Block)



It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.

-Albert Einstein

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