

Sangam: Alternative Placement in India

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Abstract

A group of students from the Institute of Education stayed for two weeks with the educational organisation 'Sangam', based in the semi-rural Indian village of Silvepura, near Bangalore. A number of educational settings were explored, including teaching experience both in an English-medium international school in Bangalore and in a Kannada-medium community school in Silvepura. This presented an opportunity to learn about educational settings in vastly different cultural, linguistic and pedagogical contexts to those previously encountered in the UK.

Sita School

Sita School is a Kannada-medium community school of approximately 30 pupils in Silvepura. It draws upon and extends the ideas of Rudolph Steiner, amongst others, to provide a learning experience thoroughly grounded in investigation and exploration, with an emphasis on the natural world. Vertical tutoring is employed throughout.

Two weeks were spent with various groups of children, with a focus on mathematics. Sita's focus on the natural world presented an opportunity to implement several 'Maths Trails': expeditions to find and reason about the underlying mathematics in nature. Activities included finding and exploring shape, sorting objects using simple set theory and investigating map-colouring.

Various mathematical resources were also built and donated to the school, and a Pro-Bot™ was used very successfully in an introductory Computing session. Basic commands were introduced, after which pupils supported each other in exploring, debugging and problem-solving in an obstacle-course exercise.

Trio World School

Trio World School is a private, English-medium international school situated in Sahakara Nagar, providing for students from Nursery to Year 13. Trio offers a primary stage that follows the pre-2014 English National Curriculum.

Two weeks were spent in Year 5, in a class of approximately ten students. During that time, observation, assistance and some whole-class teaching was undertaken. The pedagogical style employed by the staff at Trio is heavily focussed on textbook use and rote learning. Manipulables and investigation-oriented lessons were successfully used to explore fractions, a problem area for the class. At the end of the placement, IOE students conducted staff training on the reforms to the National Curriculum that would affect Trio.

The Baale Mane, Gopalapura

The Baale Mane is a girls' home in Gopalapura, providing long-term support for victims of domestic violence, child labour and homelessness aged 6-18. Three afternoon sessions to organise (primarily musical) activities for the girls took place. Mathematics was also incorporated through the use of an oversized set of tangrams, which was built and donated to the Baale Mane alongside other resources.

About Sangam

Sangam is an educational organisation based in the village of Silvepura, near Bangalore. They offer professional development and study experiences for visiting teachers and students. The organisation is situated in 'The Land', originally an artistic retreat but now home to the Sangam staff and accommodation for visitors.



Assembly at Sita School.

Conclusions

The Sangam experience offered broad scope for developing teaching praxis in differing cultural contexts and across languages. Its main advantages have been:

- Experience of teaching to non-English-speakers
- Cultural and pedagogical exchange
- Opportunities to apply and develop techniques learned on the PGCE course, such as Maths Trails
- Establishing links with schools overseas
- Developing teacher confidence

An immensely valuable experience, the Alternative Placement at Sangam will inform best practice in SE2 and beyond.