

DahanuTales

Facilitating English
language learning

Under the guidance of:
Prof. Alka Hingorani

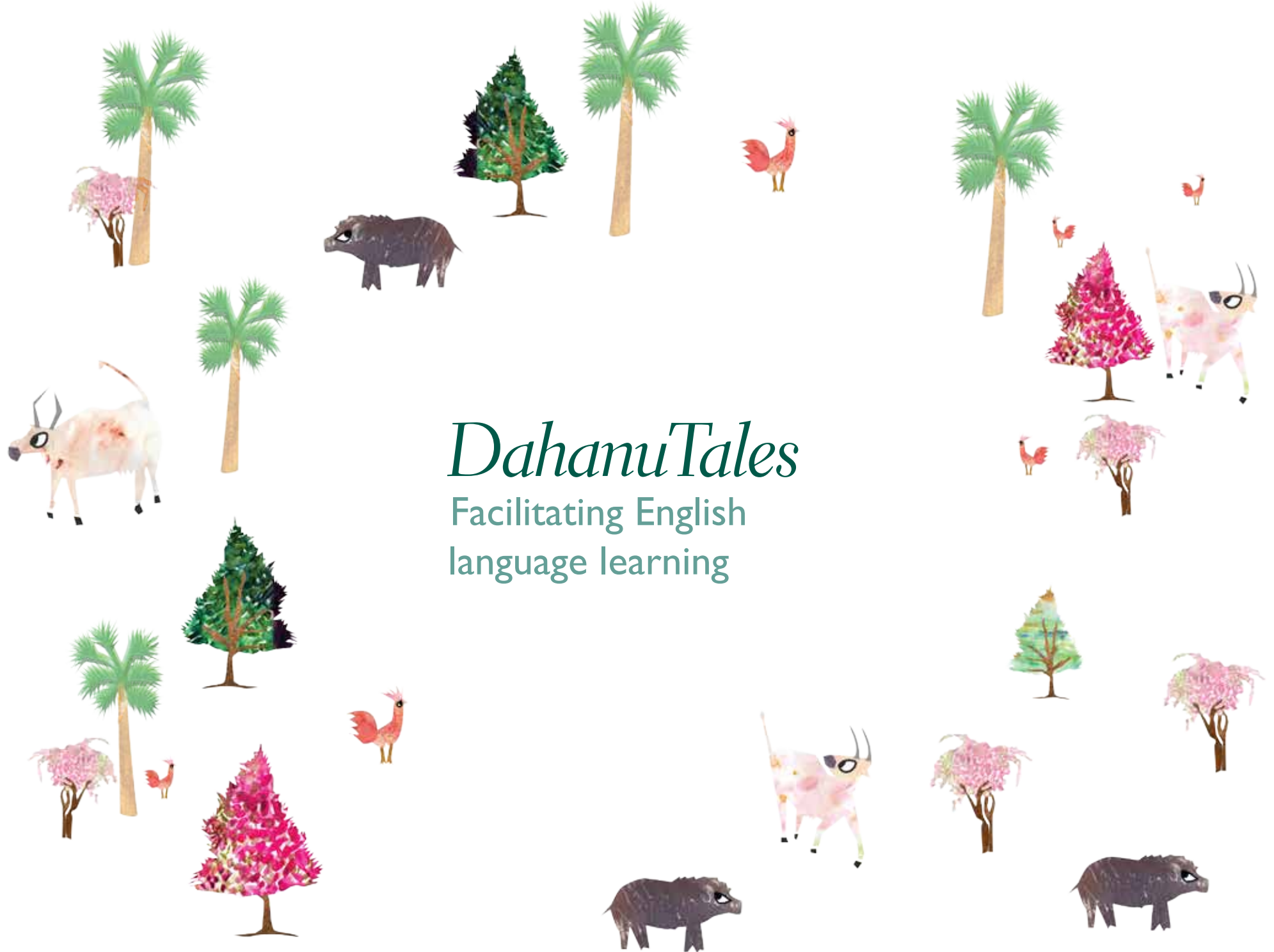
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Visual Communication
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Dahanu Tales

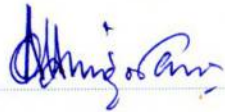
Facilitating English
language learning



Approval Sheet

The Visual Communication–Project 3 titled
“DahanuTales - Facilitating English language learning”
by Karan Vohra, roll no 146250005 is approved, in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of design in Visual Communication.

Guide



Chairman



External Examiner



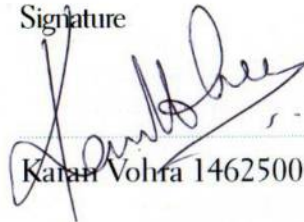
Internal Examiner


6th June 16

Declaration

I declare that this submission represents my ideas in my own words and where other's ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all the principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/data/fact/ source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have, thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken where needed.

Signature



Karan Vohra 146250005

Date

25/5/16

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Tata Centre
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Contents

1.	Abstract	1
2.	Motivation	3
3.	Initial Work	7
4.	Secondary Research	13
4.1.	Constructivism	
4.2.	Montessori method	
4.3.	Activity based learning	
4.4.	ABC for adults	
4.5.	Hole in the wall	
4.6.	Dr Seuss' books	
4.7.	Same language subtitling (Bookbox)	
4.8.	Mathematical toys and origami	
5.	Primary Data	21
6.	Prototypes	25
6.1.	Game based on tippy-tippy-tap.	
6.2.	Hexaflexagons/Dodecahexaflexagons	
6.3.	Abecedarian Book	
7.	Dahanu Tales	31
7.1.	Limitations of Abecedarian Book	
7.2.	1st Update	
7.3.	2nd Update	
7.4.	3rd Update	
7.5.	4th Update	
8.	Conclusion	39
9.	Bibliography	41
10.	Annexe	43

I. Abstract

The project aims at facilitating English language learning in resource constrained environments. It aims at making the language more familiar in a context where it is largely alien and enables an engagement with it outside the 'English classroom'.

One of the key ideas is to improve engagement through content that reflects and is sensitive to the socio-cultural and geographical landscape of the said environment. This is done through games and stories that reinforce vocabulary and alphabet recognition.

Students at G.S.S Khun, Himachal



¹The need was articulated by two kinds of people that Professor Alka met in the larger Kullu district during her doctoral research years ago. Shyam Lal Ji a teacher in a school, who continues to be LETS' primary contact, and the other was a person engaged in helping educated young men and women find means of livelihood other than farming (which is the primary occupation in these hills) without having to migrate to towns like Chandigarh and Delhi. He had lived in Delhi for years, and felt strongly that these young people should have an option to live and work in the

hills and valleys where they'd grown up, and yet be able to participate in the larger, more cosmopolitan worlds represented by cities.

²Grammangal works with the constructivist approach. The organization believes that it is important and necessary to provide proper environment so that the children can get a variety of experiences and learn on their own from those experiences. This thinking is the cornerstone of Grammangal's approach. It also uses the support of cognitive science in its educational research.

2. Motivation

Need: the need for assistance in English language learning came from the field itself. Educators from G.S.S Khun, Himachal as well as Grammangal, Aina, Dahanu both, felt the need for the language to be taught or engaged with in more effective ways.

Khun: In the remote hill villages of Himachal Pradesh there is a great need for connectivity with the country as well as the wider world. In these villages at 8- and 9- and 10,000 feet above sea level, small clusters of homes and families cling to difficult terrain and arduous life-styles, with limited access to news or communication, travel or interaction. Development hasn't reached in a big way in these places. Most people move to states like Punjab and Haryana in search of work.

Grammangal: Aina, Dahanu: Access to Dahanu is limited. A train journey from Mumbai to Dahanu Road, followed by shared tempo rides is the way to reach Aina. Farming and brick making among other things are the more commonly practiced professions among people here. Rice is most commonly grown. The people of this area have limited access to the larger world. Malhar Kudi, Warli and Katkari are some of the languages spoken here, languages that have a very limited radius. As with Khun, there is very little in their environment, that gives them access to the larger world. Close proximity to towns allow for alternate

careers but it doesn't inspire or drive them to do things differently, or inspire ambition. When I speak of ambition here, I don't mean that one kind of work is necessarily better. It is in fact the power to imagine alternative possibilities of working with and within a community of thinkers, creators and educators. This hasn't happened in a significant way. Having said that, little of their lives, rich in their own way, rooted in their culture is ever reflected in the curriculum that is taught to the students; nor are the stories that they come across.

Problem: Information and the facility to effect change and make informed decisions on the kind of development needed for their environment isn't available. There is nothing in the environment of this culturally rich state that prepares young men and women for admittance – for communication and interchange with the world outside their own geography. They speak Hindi and Pahari (various dialects that change every 10 to 25 kms), and they learn by rote the lessons of English grammar and vocabulary that are needed to pass an exam. Creating and modifying livelihoods in the changing globalised landscape is made harder when they are isolated from the world. This poor connectivity with the world can be bridged via the world wide web. Not only in ways of information access but also interaction- interaction with a community of creators, thinkers and doers.

Internet offers them admission into this community and the possibility of growth through interaction and exchange of ideas, opinions, plans and designs. Internet bridges geographical remoteness. But the world wide web, diverse as it is, still largely (over two-thirds of the available material) speaks to us in English. And hence the need to learn the language. Access to internet allows people to imagine alternative futures without having to give in to alternative geographies. In the Indian context where 150 million people speak the language. It is very important to tap into job opportunities which require a working knowledge of English as well as to simply find out about things. Internet allows one to speak to the world. To work with and within it.

There is, however, enough in their environment to enrich and to cultivate ideas worth sharing, problems that need solution. Here English serves as a powerful bridge.

LETS: This project is part of an ongoing live project at the Tata Center for technology and design namely LETS (Learn English through Stories) under the guidance of Prof. Alka Hingorani.

*Students at Grammangal, Aina, Dahanu.
Photo Credits: LETS team*



-
1. **Problems in the curriculum:** The curriculum taught via NCERT books or state board books is not contextualised to the socio-economical and historical culture of the place and is not mindful of its geography. **When context and language are both alien the gap between student and language increases.** English curriculum has Shakespeare and Wordsworth. Writings by native authors or authors that write about the region. (Lack of relatability with the subject matter) is absent. The content does not address the struggles and concerns of its audience, thus lacking empathy.
 2. **Teachers** themselves have low confidence and facility with language. They often use the native language to teach English, using a 'translative approach'. While it helps students to use the structure of the familiar language to peg the new one, it is fraught with several problems. This translative approach is not done with conscious thought given to pedagogy. Furthermore, languages such as Hindi and English are different in several ways. English is phonemic, meaning that the pronunciation of a word isn't always the same as the spelling. In spite of the drawbacks of this method, it exhibits the "power of the familiar", allowing students a framework on which they can peg and find similarities as well as dissimilarities. The lower confidence and unfamiliarity with the language calls for an incidental teaching of teachers as well.
 3. **English language is alien:** In an environment where the language isn't encountered at home, spoken at school, heard on media platforms or seen on signage, the language appears more alien. It becomes difficult to 'surround' or 'immerse' the student in it. There is no audio-visual input either.
 4. Students aren't part of the process of education, something that isn't specific to resource-constrained environments but an overall malaise of the education system. When students are more involved in the act of learning, ownership and acceptance, desire to learn increases.

Kullu's Curious Kollu, created with illustrations such as the one shown on the right by students Rahul, Pranjal, Pooja, Nirmala, Meenakshi and Manisha.



³Kullu's Curious Kollu is a story set in the kullu valley. Kollu, a sloth bear is unable to understand how he finds food, on his journey he meets villagers from Kullu villages, priests and creatures like octopi among others. It was conceptualized after an initial field trip to G.S.S Khun, and Government Primary School, Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, in November 2014. Illustrated using drawings and sketches the students made then, and photographs that were taken during the trip, the book draws from the familiar and personal experiences of students to facilitate English language learning in remote rural areas. Made under the guidance of Prof A. Hingoran. Ruchi Shah and I created the layout and design of the book under the guidance of Prof A. Hingorani. The initial draft was written by me and several other edits and versions were created by Aarti Latkar and Prof. Hingorani. The illustrations were created in collage medium from the artworks of 35 students from G.S.S, Khun and government school of Kullu.

3. Initial work

The mobile phone revolution happened in Himachal a while back. The initial direction of the project was to create applications that would engage audiences and create a sense of wonder with the language, enabling language learning. Some of the ideas that came through brainstorming, before the first visit were:

- Mobile application games based on existing games such as snakes(Nokia), parachute(apple iPod) and digital ping pong (Nintendo). These were modified in a way that crossing the obstacles helps in understanding sentence structure.
- Physical games that enable students to interact with English in the outdoors. Installations, typographic explorations, word games.
- Creating stories with composite complex artworks that encourage multiple interpretations and stories instead of hinting at one version of a sequential storyline.

It was seen that the children took to the idea of stories very well, creating vibrant story-lines as well as artworks to support them. We never tire of listening to stories. They engage the mind, captivate, and arrest attention. The question wasn't 'why stories' but, rather 'how' to harness their potential for language learning. We worked with the artwork and stories created by the students in the initial visit to create a children's storybook called 'Kullu's Curious Kollu'

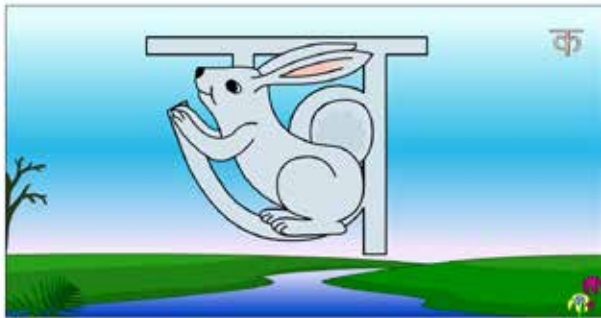


Composite, complex artworks to encourage multiple interpretations and stories.



*Clockwise:
Baseline study at G.S.S Khun.
Baseline study at Grammangal,
Student using LETS app and
art workshops at Khun.*





taraakshar.org in Delhi: Comparing organic forms as analogies to letter forms and nestling into a story to help in memorizing.

From the baseline studies one of the key points that emerged was — 10-15% of students struggled with alphabet recognition. Confusing ‘b’ and ‘d’, ‘p’ and ‘q’ among other such pairs. **Several propositions** were made to tackle this problem, such as:

1. Contextual multi-sensory, multimedia approach to teaching A-Z. Lots of words in English are part of the vocabulary in rural areas – bulb for example- even if the language in itself is largely alien,. Combine these contextual words with a tactile element by using materials that start with the same letter, eg. G for glass. Get an audio input in the native language and voila!
2. Animating alphabets to form objects that are morphologically similar to the letter form. ‘taraakshar.org’ uses forms similar in shape to Devanagari letters to help with memorize the same. They use these characters in a story as well to reinforce the letters.

Listening, speaking and comprehension issues owing to alien content were to be tackled using other ideas such as:

1. Theatre - Addressing problems of context, speaking and listening by way of a play. Creating a play from the region with the help of students. Rehearsing the said lines and giving focus to the meaning of these lines would allow students to find meaning and worth in learning English.
2. Multilingual reading of English text set in a rural Maharashtra landscape- Assisting comprehension by offering commentary in Marathi (alternatively other regional language

I chose to work in Dahanu instead of Khun as the field was closer thus easier access for trials and research. Moreover, Grammangal follows activity based learning, thus teachers are more accepting of alternate teaching methodologies.

It was imperative to visit the field, that is, Grammangal School in Aina Dahanu, to get a deeper understanding of the environment and it's problems. Moreover to assess if the proposed solutions would benefit the students or work in this environment.

Adoption of Montessori system without any adherence to context



⁴ <http://flintobox.com/> Flintobox is a service for different age groups (2-3, 3-4, 4-8) that uses activity based learning and Montessori-like tools without bringing in an Indian context. While this service is targeted at urban households, it doesn't bring in the context of even an urban Indian city let alone a rural scenario.

4. Secondary Data

Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory of knowledge that argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas. Within constructivism, social constructivism finds favour with my viewpoint. While constructivism encourages learning through self discovery and guidance through facilitators. Social Constructivism lays emphasis on the importance of the culture and context in which this learning happens. When children learn concepts in their context and culture they are able to apply these concepts more readily. From the social constructivist viewpoint, it is thus important to take into account the background and culture of the learner throughout the learning process, as this background also helps to shape the knowledge and truth that the learner creates, discovers and

attains in the learning process (Wertsch 1997). Other constructivist scholars agree with this and emphasize that individuals make meanings through the interactions with each other and with the environment they live in. Knowledge is thus a product of humans and is socially and culturally constructed

The social constructivist paradigm views the context in which the learning occurs as central to the learning itself (McMahon 1997). In several regions that we have visited it is seen that culture's reflection on language and teaching is often missing.



Alphabets made using felt for texture. Blocks with different entities starting with the same letter. Movable letters for creating words, toys to create new words and flash cards to help in identification - Montessori tools.

⁵ <http://www.thebetterindia.com/23410/she-travels-canada-gujarat-montessori-underprivileged-kids-jivapar/> There are individuals and NGO's making efforts to change this. Munira Nagji, an NRI, has setup a Montessori school for underprivileged children.

⁶ SMILE foundation has started a 'Balwadis' project with Panvel where they are opening/restoring 4 Balwadis that are centres for learning in rural Maharashtra. This includes providing educational material similar to what is used in the Montessori schools of urban India and imparting instructions through a hybrid approach of a local Balwadi instructor and a DVD containing pre-recorded lessons from a highly skilled and certified Montessori teacher.

Montessori Method

Montessori education is an educational approach developed by Italian physician and educator Maria Montessori based on her extensive research with “phrenasthenic” or “special needs” children and characterized by an emphasis on independence, freedom within limits, and respect for a child’s natural psychological, physical, and social development. Even as Montessori is appropriated by different school in different ways, some of the basic requirements laid down by Montessori are

1. Mixed age classrooms, with classrooms for children ages 2½ or 3 to 6 years old by far the most common
2. Student choice of activity from within a prescribed range of options
3. Uninterrupted blocks of work time, ideally three hours
4. A constructivist or “discovery” model, where students learn concepts from working with materials, rather than by direct instruction
5. Specialized educational materials developed by Montessori and her collaborators
6. Freedom of movement within the classroom
7. A trained Montessori teacher

Montessori in India:

- These days Montessori toys and teaching aids are readily available. They are expensive and attuned to American standards. They haven’t been adapted for use in India, especially rural India. Even a method as effective as Montessori becomes limiting if the content is too alien.
- There are several Montessori schools in India chiefly in cities and metropolitan areas . There have been attempts made by NGOs like SMILE and individuals to impart Montessori education in rural areas .

According to several teachers and academicians, the Montessori method works for a multitude of reasons.

- There is no competition between students.
- Enough time is given to explore concepts,
- Montessori tools are made of natural materials, are aesthetically pleasing and allow engagement of multiple senses.

⁷The UNICEF-supported ABL venture, first undertaken by the Chennai Corporation in 13 schools on a trial basis in 2003, has been adopted by all the 270 primary schools in the district, transforming the way

Activity based learning

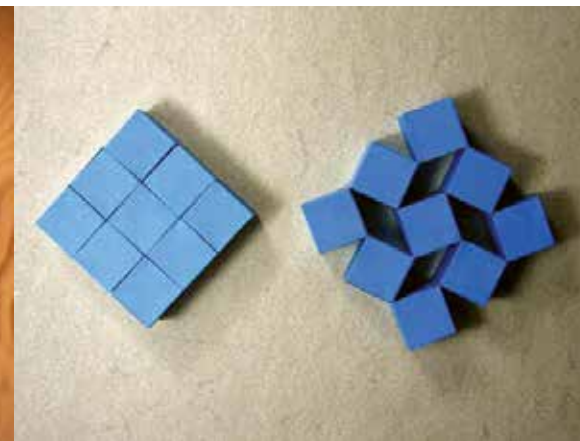
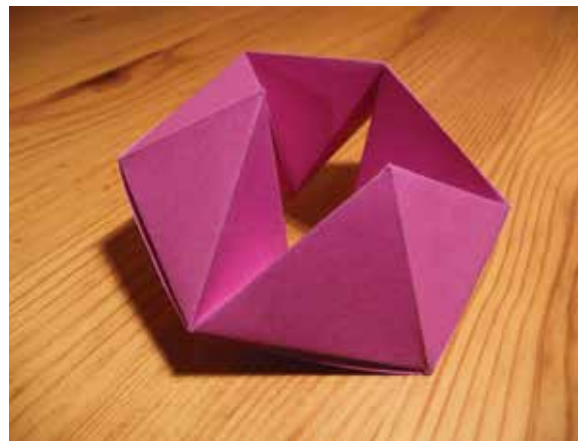
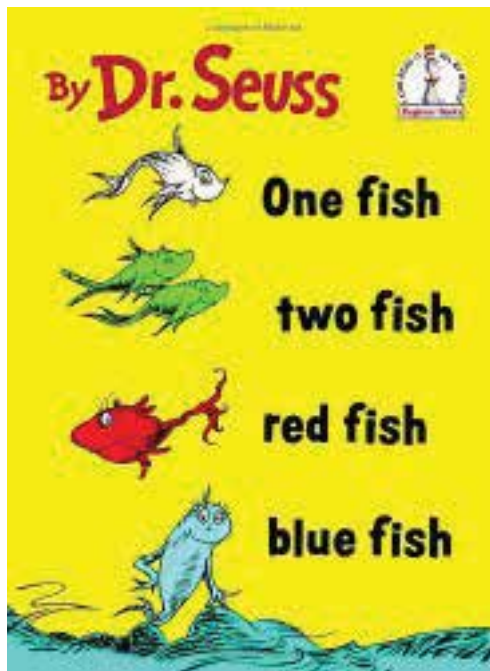
Activity based learning believes in the idea that children are active learners rather than passive observers. It was introduced in India by David Horsburgh in 1944. It has taken several efforts on the part of the government as well as UNICEF to enable it to spread. Activity based learning builds confidence as well as the ability to take one's own decisions. Curriculum is divided into milestones. One goes to the next level on one's own pace. It seems to be a good method for mixed age classrooms where students can make their

own decisions. Thanks to the Internet a plethora of activities to explain specific concepts are available. . For instance: Students make rainbow fishes, write the word RAINBOW vertically. Later they would make adjectives with the letters R, A, I and so on to describe themselves. Alternatively, an accordion caterpillar with 11 faces, the letters of the word on each face. The children would be asked to write the name of a food item that a caterpillar is likely to have. C for Cabbage, A for Apple for instance.

ABC for Adults

I also looked at methods used to teach ABC for adults, in order to get an insight into techniques used for older people. It recommends using presentations and words that find use in their day to day work. Keeping decoration to a minimum, using flash cards and allowing space for learning. For students in classes 5th onwards, this may or may not work entirely. Using content that isn't dumbed down is a good insight however. Older students may not have proficiency with the language but content that is not challenging to their level of intellect can make learning boring.

I also looked at courses that used scenarios to teach language. The course is used to teach foreign students English by placing them in a scenarios like taking a visa interview, getting a hotel booking, acting in emergency situations. They would be taught the minimum words needed to communicate basic needs and build on it from then on. Teaching through scenarios is helpful if students find the scenario exciting and possible.



Clockwise:
 Students engaging with computers fixed in walls,
 bookbox: much like karaoke, the subtitles get colored as the
 text progresses,
 origami and mathematical toys like 3d Hexaflexagon,
 wobbling wall of cubes and mobius strip,
 Dr. Seuss' one of many books.

Hole in the wall

Sugata Mitra, Professor of Educational Technology at the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences at Newcastle University, England experimented by placing a computer in a wall with access to the keyboard and screen and observed how children learnt through peer learning and through active participation. While there may not be enough statistics or numbers to support his claims, it is an incredible idea. Moreover it does support the belief that children are active learners and learn through discovery.

Same language subtitling (Bookbox)

Bookbox uses same language subtitling alongside animated shorts with engaging story lines. It is highly recommended by many. As the child relates the phonetic sound to the visual text, reading becomes automatic, subconscious and incidental to the engaging story. It is an interesting model and is cost effective. It makes learning fun. The stories are tailor made for younger children, therefore aren't of as much interest to older children who have a higher level of comprehension notwithstanding less facility with the language.

Dr Seuss's Books

Dr Seuss's books help in the phonemic aspect of English language, assisting pronunciation along with pushing imagination with entertaining text and beautiful illustrations. They allow children to enter an interesting world, and are simple and very insightful in their word usage. I think that they are universally entertaining, irrespective of the 'context' in which they are placed.

Mathematical Toys and Origami

Much research went into toys that are used for incidental learning. The research was prompted by lateral thinking rather than a set path down the English language learning road. I looked into Mobius strips, hexaflexagons (3 face, 4 face, 12 face), wobbling walls of cubes, 3D hexaflexagons and a myriad ways to use them as learning tools or tools of play. This research was heavily contributed to by Youtubers like Vart who go beyond DIY and explain ways in which origami goes beyond craft. Origami held particular interest as it is frugal and encourages self-learning.



With students whilst they eat their lunch

An evening spent playing antakshari and dancing to the tunes of Aina



5. Primary Data

I stayed at Grammangal, Aina, Dahanu for a week to observe and understand the lives that the students led. The functioning of the school, student's behavior, their engagement with their surrounding as well as the subjects taught in school. During this trip I came across several educators and their interpretation of the socio-cultural landscape of the place, most notably Ulka Tai, Santosh Dada and Suryavanshi. The trip included a visit to the Rangkhod village to get an insight into the everyday lives of people. The entire report on the Dahanu Trip maybe seen in the annexe.



*With Shubhangi's family at Rangkhod
Student during class.*



Some of the insights vis-a-vis student's engagement with English language are:

1. Translative approach to teaching English, using Hindi and Marathi to teach the language: I attended several English language classes. Teachers explain English words using Marathi words instead of simpler English words. Students were asked to sort sentences without telling them the basis on which to sort them. Often the simplest words that may be explained by using examples are taught through dictionaries. Taste words like sour, sweet, salty were not explained using the foods that taste such, instead the students were asked to look for them in dictionaries.

2. Context of English:

- English as a language is totally alien to the people of Aina. Signboards, banners or hoarding that use English words like 'tailor', 'bus', 'wine' are used as transliteration, sans the latin script.
- The curriculum doesn't reflect the concerns of the place. Their stories, their people and their livelihoods aren't reflected in the text. Instead it speaks of urban culture or stories from the west. This gap in content creates a big one in language learning.
- English is considered as a subject rather than a language. It isn't encountered at home, engaged with through TV or any other media. The school is English and Marathi medium, yet no instructions are given in English nor is it reflected in labels/signage.

3. Low confidence in reading aloud and speaking.

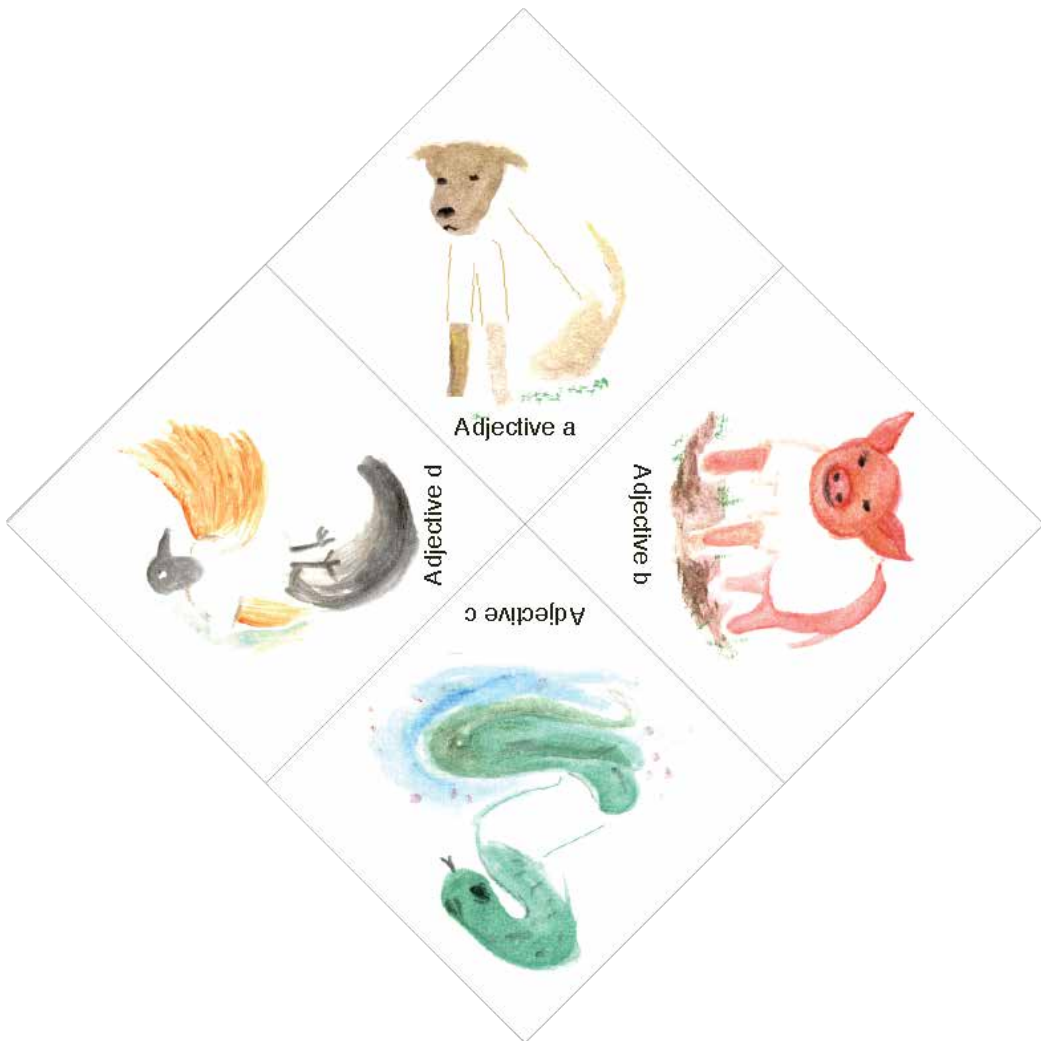
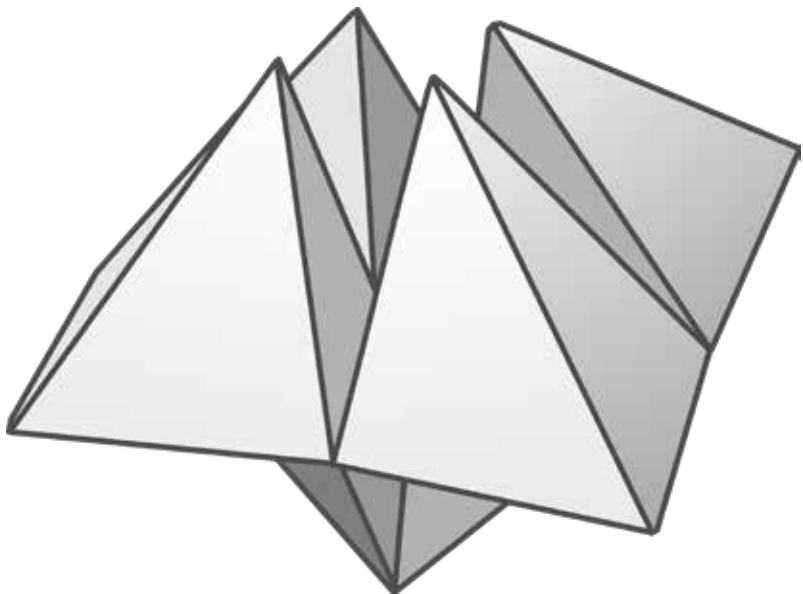
- The students at Grammangal are made to speak in the assembly for 10min everyday. They do so in Marathi, it is evident that most of them have very little confidence in speaking or reading aloud. If 5 students are to speak, four of the students end up copying what the first one said. They would choose easier topics like the walk from school. Thus, teachers encourage them to speak about topics other than their daily routine and to be original.
- In the English class when students are asked to speak up answers, frequent prompting is done to influence and little output emerges. Moreover the quality of input given by teachers isn't enough, as teachers have limited facility with the language themselves. Audio or audio-visual input in English is absent, so is any input at home over resulting in very limited English input in their surroundings.

4. Several people that I encountered here were dismissive of the tribal culture. Some teachers for instance would judge them on their drinking habits, choice of religion and even the crops they grew. The people from the community themselves do not speak of their culture with much confidence. It is thus essential to use content that acknowledges their lifestyle and shows potential for possibilities.

5. Students from Zilla parishad schools who join

Grammangal later are weaker so teaching is often done in separate groups. In English lessons while group is made to tackle words and their meanings and sentence structure, the other is helped out with spellings. Often the latter group, i.e the Zilla parishad students would have issues in identifying characters, spelling words as well as pronunciation.

6. Children have a rich engagement with nature, animals and work at home, much of which is never reflected in the stories that surround them in school curriculum. They would talk about several hunting expeditions, the kind of animals they'd hunt and later eat. Their relationship with certain animals, their distrust of cows, fascination with snakes and indifference to most birds. We would come across flowers that one could use to whistle and lotuses that would open up on their whim. On the trip to Rangkhod, Akshay and Ajay were our personal guides, pointing to us the local names of several trees. Akshay's father is a self-taught 'vaid'. He claims that he can find cure to everything and identify a plethora of trees and herbs simply by looking at them, however he cannot name them. Thus, his ability to transmit knowledge that he himself would like to pass on, is severely constrained. The pervasive influence of the English language in the daily lives of the people can enable them to tap their potential fully and facilitate dissemination and exchange of knowledge, thereby leading to a happier and more empowered community."



6. Prototypes

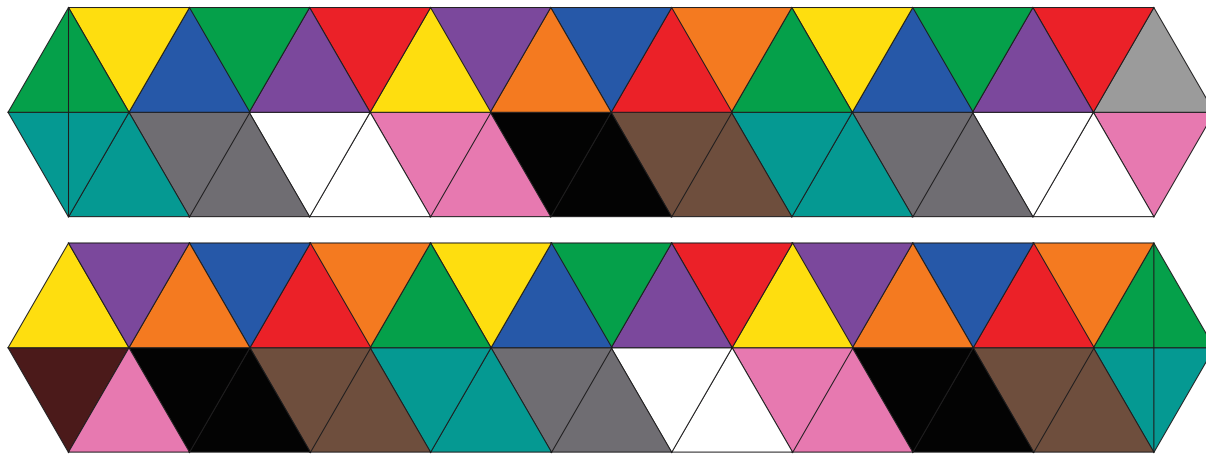
1. Game based on tippy-tippy-tap for vocabulary improvement.

Tippy tippy tap is a part of our childhood and that of children after us. There is a joy in flexing the paper toy. A game using 4 bright, characteristic animals from Dahanu itself instead of the four colors — Ghungroo (pig), Bharadwaj (Golden tailed crow), pariah dog and dhaman snake. Adjectives are used to describe these animals on the toy. Synonyms of the same adjectives are used on a different toy. Thus a unique toy is used by each child every-time they play. The person whose turn it is will play the game and show the animal that is under his flap, the player who gets the same animal is now the denner. And so it goes, incidental learning of synonyms of adjectives of these animals.

The frugality of toys and the basic illustration style encourages children to make more of them.

Advantages: The idea of using the context of the place is beneficial. The game is flexible, allowing the students to learn through discovery and re-invent the game in the process. This is so owing to familiarity with tippy-tuppy-tap.

Disadvantages: It is likely that the language learning aspect may not come through. Animals and their colors would take precedence over the synonyms. The flexibility of the game may work against it as well, taking out the language learning aspect all together.



Each color forms a face when the two strips are joined together, folded and stuck to make a dodecahexaflexagon. On flexing you get 12 faces. The way to traverse them is made simpler to understand by using primary, secondary and tertiary colors for faces.

2. Hexaflexagons/ Dodecahexaflexagon

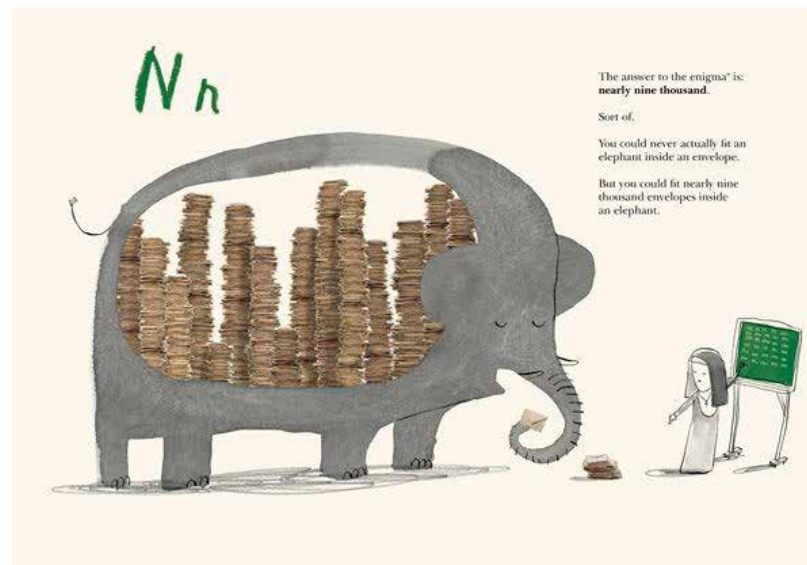
Hexaflexagons are paper hexagons folded from strips of paper which reveal different faces as they are flexed.

A Dodecahexaflexagon is a hexaflexagon that is designed such that it has 12 faces, faces that are discovered through flexing. Moreover the order in which you flex it would lead to a huge number of possible traversals.

The idea was to write stories on each of these faces. Stories whose nature should be such that traversal from any face to any other face would create a sequence that in turn makes meaning as well as stories. The toy would enthrall the reader into flexing the toy till they can explore all possible story patterns. The template of the dodecahexaflexagon

can then be shared with students to make their own and create such stories.

The number of folds and making of the toy however is complex, and even as I did make several of them, they have a good chance of wearing out over time. Moreover creating stories that would work no matter what the order proved to be a difficult task. Several explorations were done with the hexaflexagons (there are several types of them) along with mobius strips and other mathematical toys that are manifested by using folds and cutting.



⁸<http://www.heatherhaupt.com/2014/06/16/why-kids-need-us-to-read-the-same-book-over-and-over-again/>
Most books

3. Abecedarian Book

Using contextual stories to teach A-Z characters drawn from the socio-cultural and geographical landscape of Aina, Dahanu. To reinforce akshar gyaan/ alphabet knowledge, these stories were to use alliterations.

There exists several Abecedarian books that I looked into like Edward Gorey's 'The Gashlycrumb tinies' and 'The epileptic bicycle', Oliver Jeffers' 'Once upon an Alphabet' and Prabha Mallya's 'The alphabet of animals and birds'.

Why?: Repetition of letters through alliteration or by making stories cantered around a character whose name started with the letter were some strategies used. I decided to use both. Moreover lay focus on stories that would be in synch with the

lifestyle and landscape of Dahanu for reliability.

Illustrations were made for the same as well as stories were written for instance.

"Wise Wackchand's wisdom tooth"

"Umesh spilled urad dal on his usually clean umber uniform"

"At the steps, while the water washed it off, Umesh watched the washerwomen wash"

Kids often ask to read the same book over and over again. Books with Easter eggs and hidden objects often keep the children engaged. Moreover as they read the story again and again they begin to connect the images with the story even if they don't understand the text. Hearing the text read and seeing the same characters again and again helps them to form relationship between the two. Repeat book readings increases comprehension⁸ as well as phonemic awareness.

"Wise Wackchand's wisdom tooth"

"Umesh spilled urad dal on his usually clean umber uniform"

*"At the steps, while the water washed it off,
Umesh watched the washerwomen wash"*



7. DahanuTales

Limitations of Abecedarian book

The classes for which it was designed were 5th Standard and above.

The idea of the abecedarian book held promise, however the engagement with it could be less active. In my secondary research it became clear that rereading a book increases comprehension, phonemic awareness as well as engagement with the language. However, in resource constrained areas where the language is alien, who would read the book to the child multiple times? Readers' families cannot read English most times and teachers may not be able to give attention to students. Thus more work was done on the same. Students with their limited proficiency may be able to read however more interest needed to be generated.

1st Update

Instead of taking individual stories from A-Z, I decided to break up the stories between groups based on learning patterns. A, B, C, D, E, F, G would form one group H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P would form another and so on. The stories would be nestled in the same large landscape and interact with each other whilst continuing to use alphabet specific alliteration.

These stories and alliterations were written keeping following things in mind.

- My stay at the village and the various experiences and stories people shared with me, insight into their lifestyle and forms of livelihood.
- Flora, fauna of the place and student's engagement with it.
- Practices followed by the villagers, collecting Taadi, traveling via shared Jeep, hunting activities, livelihoods like brick making, harvesting rice among others.
- The names of students, rural legends and using sounds that would entertain the children like 'dhinkchak-dhinkchak' and 'ghup-ghup-ghup'.

In addition to this there would be Easter eggs to look for in the book, trees to be identified, treasure to be found, ants and characters to be counted for instance.

For C

Cawing Crows on Crazy Cows, Caw Caw Constantly

Cawing Crows Create Confusing shadows Crazy Cows Can no longer follow

Last of Caws, Last of Cows, Cawing Crows under Crazy Cows

Contextual content designed for greater engagement of the reader, reinforcing alphabet symbols as well as sounds. The content is not dumbed down based on the student's facility with the language, instead, it is relevant for these students.



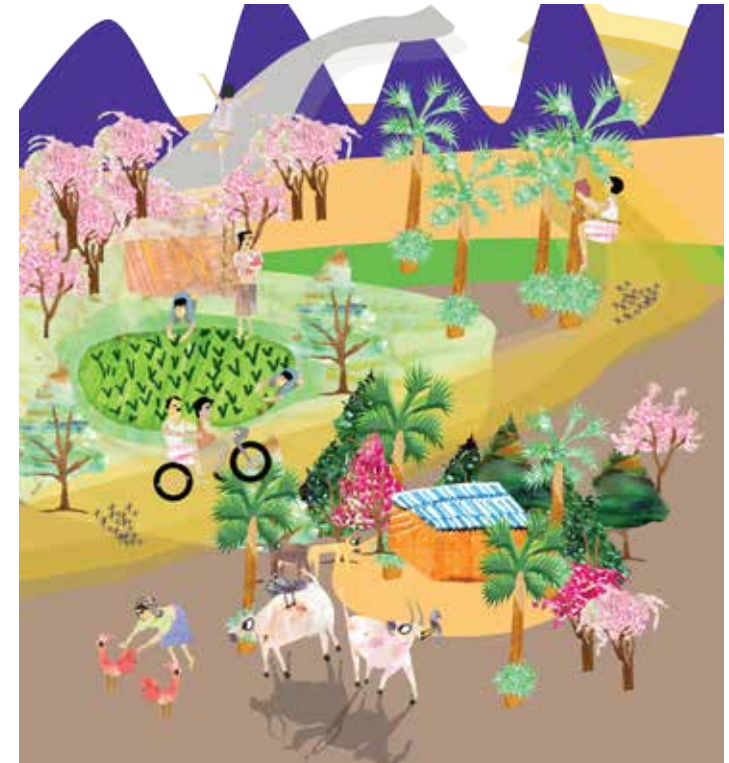
- Placement of text: 1. On the village scene/illustrations.
 2. Using flaps to write text which are unfolded.
 3. Using flaps under the illustration to write text on.



- Flow of illustrations: 1. Stories follow a central village path in the A-G order.
 2. A clockwise order of A-G is used, arranged in a circle.
 3. No order followed, random placement of the 7 stories.

2nd Update

Post the initial story layouts, lots of explorations were done with text and layout options. It was important to keep in mind the text-visual engagement. Explorations were done with text in order to keep the level simple enough to engage with but complex enough to be challenging at some point. The complexity of image may overpower text hence shifting focus all together from text. Thus text was positioned in different place to assess its effect.



Style explorations.



3rd Update

After doing several updates with the story I reconsidered the idea. While a storybook using contextual content allows for more engagement there is no mechanism in place to check the improvement.

Games on the other hand allow for peer-to-peer learning and an active engagement with the content.

In addition to this there is little output, speaking or reading aloud. Thus game based on repetition of sentences using alphabet specific alliteration. Engagement with sentences using alliteration and content that is contextual would facilitate engagement with the language, however it leaves much to be desired. Moreover it becomes difficult to assess a student's progress. Students lack confidence when it comes to speaking aloud thus a third update was considered. The joy of stories told through sentences rich in alliteration is in its telling and repeatedly so.

For a specific set of 7 characters A-G, children go through the story of said characters— an Ant, Brick-maker, Cows, Dhaaman snake, Ela (A farmer), Fulmala (A student) and Ghungroo (Indian breed of pigs). The characters of the story reinforce alphabet knowledge

The game pieces use the same characters as terracotta figures. This is a thought out strategy.

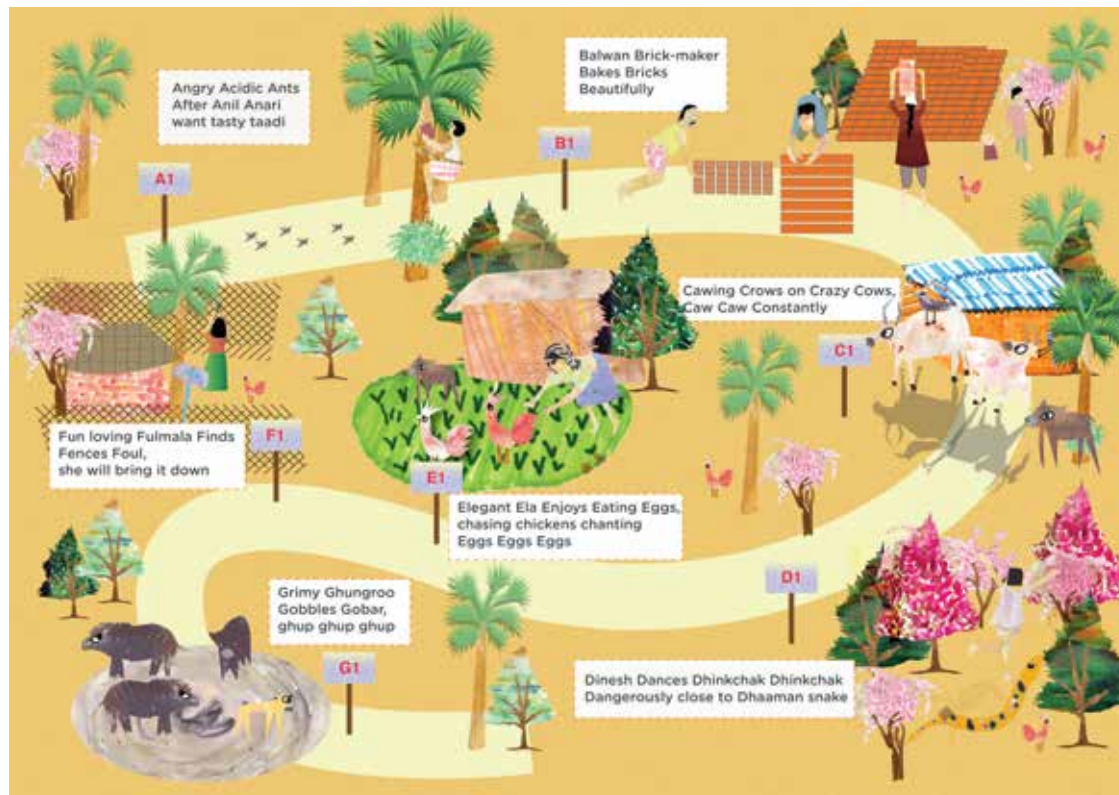
Seven or more students can play the game at a time. While some students would interfere with the game play of others, there'll be children who are less competitive. These game pieces keep them engaged and reinforce these characters for them.

The task in the game is to repeat the line as many times as the number on the dice to get ahead. Repeating sentences with these alliteration reinforces alphabet knowledge not only in terms of recognition of script but also sound.

Transliteration and translation (Marathi) are used to aid the students.

C alphabet is used in alliteration consistently for the Cow's story. Game uses small figures of characters as player pieces

This game was tested with the kids at Grammangal, Dahanu. Testing of game was met with positive feedback. Students played the game enthusiastically and enunciated the sentences with increased confidence. Peer to peer learning is assisted by the game. Player pieces keep some students engaged while they wait for their turn, while other more competitive ones would prevent the other student from completing. They did so by prompting using similar sounding words, preventing the player from seeing the sentence or using the player pieces to distract. The use of context, familiar images and words (like balewaadi, taadi) is engaging.



Clockwise:
Board for the game.
Player pieces are inspired from protagonist of story.
Alphabet boxes for Zilla parishad students.
Game cards with original text, transliterated text as well translation in Marathi



4th Update

Several visual explorations were done over time in the project. A model using a better path clearer visual relationship between story and text was made. Moreover flashcards in an accordion style with transliteration as well as translation were created. In addition to this, 'alphabet boxes' were created for Zilla parishad students using the same characters as in the game so that they can be involved in the game till their vocabulary and character recognition capability increases for them to be able to play it.

The game pieces were made in cloth, terracotta was susceptible to breakage (in fact it did crumble to pieces after game testing). However, they do not stand anymore hence I did some exploration with the toys, using bamboo and acrylic in order for them to stand.

In resource constrained areas one resource maybe used in multiple ways. The same game board maybe used as a storybook, thus I designed the game board, mindful of other potential uses. Hanging on the wall when narrating a story, spread on the floor whilst playing.

Conclusion

English language opens up a lot of opportunities. It allows people the chance to become a part of a larger community of thinkers, creators and doers. It helps one to imagine alternate realities. It also help in disseminating knowledge and information. In environments where it is alien, it is reduced to being a subject only rather than a language.

My projects attempts to increase engagement with the language, to use the familiar to teach the alien. Stories and visual imagery from the environment clubbed together with sentences rich in alphabet specific alliteration. It all comes together in the story based game called 'DahanuTales'.

While the game has been successful in engaging the student. It tries to increase a student's confidence in speaking and reading out loud. It does so by taking the aid of transliterations and translations. The project has gone through lots of explorations and trials, allowing for several visual design explorations. It has taught me to be closer to the user and understand their concerns and joys.

Initially, I was overwhelmed by the vastness of the project, the idea that there are several axis on which work has already been done. After visiting the field the context became clearer, the problem more defined. The constraints set owing to the more specific nature of problems influenced multiple trials and iterations with visual design as well as problem solving.

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Annexe

Dahanu Report

Monday

When I set foot at Van Gaon station I asked a boy how to get to Aina just to be sure and he responded in hindi 'Woh 'Jeep' milegi wahan par'. I made a mental note of 'Jeep' being a part of the English vocabulary for future use.

Later I saw that there were several shops like 'Sunita Tailor' and 'Raju Tailor' using devanagari script instead of latin. Infant I found no boards in English rarely in the entire journey from Vangaon station to Grammangal.

I reached in time for the assembly. The children speak in Marathi without a rhythmic flow (the analogy that first came to mind was little Anjali's friend in Kuch Kuch Hota hai at the Just a minute competition). There were lots of abrupt stops and unnatural pauses. Another interesting following the end of the assembly is the head count where the children would do half a jump like frogs.

The history teacher is very critical of tribal people. He says that the land belongs to Parsis and they have taken over it entirely. It is upto the tribal people now to take back what is theirs. The tribals have barely an acre to farm on and they are lazy

(according to him), unwilling to farm anything other than rice which is a convenient option (he thinks that growing cucumbers would be an alternate, more profitable option, however their laziness and lack of will/courage to bring about change stops them from doing anything).

Ulka tai, remarks that since january they have been encouraging students to speak. Facilitating their confidence and public speaking skills. Earlier they would read only from the book. When asked to stop reading from the book, they would look upwards, downwards, sideways (anything except facing the crowd, eye to eye). They would organize children in groups and when their turn would come everyone would repeat what the first one's story with slight modification. Most of these stories were about 'I was coming to school, my friend fell down and then I laughed at him'. The teachers modified this tradition and asked older kids to speak of more important, richer things, leaving the mundane to younger kids (1st standard, 2nd standard). The aim was for them to speak 15 or more lines well. Everything was in Marathi but my interactions with the kids or the village visit to Rangkod came up.

Ulka tai gave me a little lesson in the history of the place. Jiju Bhai Bhadyser and Tarabhai Modak

brought in the montessori method full time in education. They started the angan wadi foundation. Ami tai Vak started Grammangal with Dr Ramesh Panchey, an economics professor at SNTD. They say that in the field of education everyone blames the last level. College blames junior college for not imparting good education, Jr. college blames high school, so on and so forth. Therefore if the children were given good education from ground up there will be less space for such blame games.

Technology and teaching aids focusing on primary education were needed. When Gandhi saw the Montessori blocks, he remarked that they were very useful but surely expensive for people in India. Thus Grammangal makes these teaching aids with locally available material. Disposed boxes, bottle caps, stones, wood among others. The idea would be to teach practically and then assist using cards. I saw several of the aids available for assisting the learning. Dividing three letter words into two parts: at for instance paired with c, s, m, b to make cat, sat, mat and bat. I looked at other such materials. I found that these materials were easy to pass on.

I attended English lesson for fourth class and to my surprise only two students were present (the strength otherwise was 7). They were asked to make

sentences using the words open and close. The exercise however was more about filling up nouns rather than creating anything new. For instance Open the door, Open the cupboard, Open the box. The nouns chosen won't entail the replacement of the article either. Some children spell well while others don't. They would pronounce F as aph. The children were attentive but hardly excited, somewhat bored. The girl was more proactive while the boy was almost always looking at his feet or his fingers. They were never looking outside though (unlike children in urban schools who teachers complain of indulging in the outside world). The classroom has dim lighting. The stools and mats aren't used in class, mats are used outside.

The English class with 6th standard and Santosh Dada was next. Groups of children would be made in English class (I observed the same in Maths as well), each group would be given a different activity to engage in using different aids. A group was given different kind of sentences to arrange in while another group was asked to tell spellings of words. I was sitting next to Suraj and Sanjay. Suraj likes to speak and was first to take charge. The lesson is confusing though. On what basis are the sentences to be put in groups? The confusion is there because one girl asks the other the same question. Several children don't understand the meaning of the sentence entirely, hence separation is one step ahead. It's peer to peer learning, students assist each other however there is always someone who doesn't get a sentence slip in hand. Sanjay corrects one kid who pronounces kites as kits. 'Kits nahi kites' corrects Sanjay. While some kids are separating them on the basis of sentence formation

others are doing so based on the meaning, yet others are separating based on the object. At the end of the lesson after all the separation is done, the purpose of this isn't explained. The children aren't terribly bothered by this though. There are a few students in the group who much like the fourth standard boy spend certain time looking at their feet or (admiring?) their fingers. The meanings are explained entirely in Marathi instead of simpler English. No one asks or answers in English, it's translative English (something Santosh Dada tells me in the second half of the trip).

I am told that Scheduled tribes speak in Warli, Karkari and Malar Kuri and that there is no 'bhed' anymore. Later in the evening the kids show me a much different picture when one kid informs me that girls from their village won't marry sons from Sukha Pada in front of the kid from said village. Most kids agree. The 'bhed' isn't there anymore? I don't think so. Children talk to each other nicely otherwise.

Suryavanshi Sir tells me that parents don't show up for parent teacher meetings. They don't want to for time constraints. A teacher suggests that parents think 'Bacche jaate hain toh jayen'. He shows me Taari, the tree from which the alcohol drink with laxative properties is made. He says with much criticism that most of 'these people' have these trees and drink instead of planting some good useful vegetation. Suryavanshi teaches history as well as kheti (farming). Suryavanshi also happens to be a caretaker of the dormitory so we have a lot of conversations, many of those conversations comprise of his complaints about the dormitory, people and kids at large. I shall share certain opinions of his

later, but I feel that he is just generally a cribber so his pessimistic opinions are perhaps shadowed by general pessimism.

We move on to lunch. A large group of kids from Grammangals' Pune chapter have come to visit. They have been here for three days already, Monday was the last day of the visit. This school teaches Urban kids using the same constructivist methodology as Grammangal. They teach up to tenth. The teachers aren't especially trained though. The History teacher did an 8 day workshop and was asked to carry out some lessons in order to check if she could handle activity based learning. The fees is about 30K per year, however the strength isn't very strong, it reduces 4th standard onwards. She said that the children that come to their school often join because they didn't get admission elsewhere, while a small percentage of kids come because of stress, homework and burden felt in other schools. I was curious to know how concepts like Algebraic equations, trigonometry and other such heavier concepts taught through activity based learning. They do not teach complex things via activities but simply generate interest. Activities to teach sine, cosine and tan using tree heights and shadows for instance. History is introduced by exploring personal history, history of school, area and city. Much of the way the syllabus is learnt is much the same structural way though. After passing out from their school, they adjust well in Jr. College, though their performance isn't exceptional or poor, it's regular.

At lunch I saw that these kids are very well behaved (Grammangal kids had, had their lunch, I am talking about Pune kids here). They get their own food and dutifully wash their utensils using

an ashtray :P (well it's a tray with ash that acts as cleaner). I sit on the ground with the other kids. I see that there aren't well established hierarchies here. This young child from 6th standard has been talking forever while the two tenth standards children actively participate in the discussion without being condescending or bringing in elder-younger complex. Perhaps the 6th standard kid is precocious, much of it is in marathi so I am not able to decipher the exact contents.

Following this I attend the class by Suryavanshi Sir, it's a history class. Initially students seem to really enjoy stories. He invokes Saif Alik Khan as the new nawaab when he is speaking of rulers. He divides Muslims as sunnis and sufis (when infact it is sunnis and shias, I don't say anything offcourse, just observe from distance) He says that muslims are responsible for trade, and explains that the differences between sunnis and shias has been at the heart of all problems and wars giving examples of fight between Iran and Iraq. Mention Osama Bin laden, ISIS and 9/11. They don't know about these present events and I see that children repeat words on cue without much interest or commitment. It is in this class that I find children looking out of the window and having just enough concentration to repeat the words asked to repeat. I sense strong islamophobia.

He goes on to speak about Akbar and Jodha, students don't take notes which is absurd for a history class. Later in another conversation students admit that they find history boring because it has too much of 'stories'. Girls giggle but are very aware of the authority. There is a stampede when the bell rings. Later Sir asks me if I was evaluating his class, strange, considering I didn't say much or write

anything much while in the class.

He tells me that a large part of the land belongs to the parsis, and the tribals are lazy, they are satisfied in their 2 acre lands when in fact they should demand their land back. He says that the kids don't even have a concept of a capital let alone understanding what fatehpur sikhri is. He is very critical of tribal people for living only in the present and seeking immediate goals only. Which is why they easily accept Christianity. Christianity promises them of a better way of life, better food and better luck. Sermons are given in a makeshift church which become more significant than gita because there is no one reading from the Gita (like a motivational speaker). Moreover Christianity somehow limits consumption of alcohol hence it is the 'preferred religion'. Students don't have a sense or understanding of freedom according to him. He believes that since he has the blood of marathas and Shivaji he understands freedom. Women understand freedom because they have waited for their freedom fighter husbands. The reason he invokes the present in a history lesson is to encourage them to know more about the world around them. To see outside of their microcosm. He believes they are set in their ways not willing to try anything new, growing rice time after time, knowing that it isn't as profitable. He teaches farming in the hope that the students will take it upon themselves to change the way they farm. He demonstrates to me that cucumber can be grown by making a 2ft deep pit filling it up with soil and then planting the plant 2inch below the surface of the soil. It is clear that he wants their life to be better but it's a very colonial way of looking at it. Every suggestion he makes for improvement of their life starts with the assumption that they will disappoint.

His anger comes out in his need for control and upliftment of those he can't 'uplift'. Students only come to the school for their midday meal. Parents want to get rid of them for that time and don't want another stomach to be filled so they send the children to school.

Antakshari- In the evening there is a program, an antakshari competition between the kids at Grammanagal and Pune school kids. It is flooded with bhajjans, prayers, nature hymns, patriotic songs and a few bollywood songs. The interesting thing is that most of the songs sung by Grammanagal kids are not known to the pune kids and vice versa. I, offcourse, don't understand most of them except 'Re mama re mama re mama re'. Within the grammanagal kids too there are groups, certain songs are not known to all, perhaps they are in warli or malhar kudi only. It's strange how the methodology to teach the kids is the same but even their songs are so different. There isn't tremendous urban influence either. I mean the number of film songs sung by the two groups are more or less equal. There is diversity but it seems that the songs are fed in. It does happen in the assembly, they sing all these prayers and bhajjans and I wonder if it's ok to push such content on to children without giving them the take it or leave it options. The antakshari ended with some more bhajjans and then everyone went for dinner.(so many of them :P)

As I was listening to the hymns and chants I was reminded of Gadchiroli and Nirman Camp. We were made to sing along Sanskrit chants and songs. There is a certain battle coming our way. There are those who pass on these traditions and hymns to children. I wonder if children really understand

the culture that is imposed on them and whether this is indeed the culture? It is a prevailing culture of the school or region but does it hold any real significance. On the flip-side people who want to save-guard this culture, often know little about it. The voice is often outwardly rather than coming from within the community. I am talking about the saviours complex that we often suffer with. Suryavanshi Sir suffers from the same saviour's complex that design students or craft resurrectors suffer from in some way. I haven't had the chance to muse more over this but this is what was going on in my head as the bhajjan overflow was happening.

During dinner I sat with the teachers so as to get some introductions, I met with the headmistress and the other teachers. They were going to all stay back to partake in the dance celebrations and so were the students. Several students from Grammangal were staying in the same room as I. It is here that I found about the 'bheda bhav' that continues to exist. The kids wanted to hear stories so I told them the story of Birbal and the barber. Also the story of the King and his dressmaker (in the end the king is wearing nothing and is thought of as mad). I later narrated the story of Rapunzel, offering to tell it in English. They were against the idea altogether. I did tell it both in English as well as Hindi but it was clear that they didn't enjoy it as much as the other two :(

There were students singing and playing in the room. It is important to notice that I children would inform me of a particular schoolmate's talent without showing any jealousy or ambition themselves.

Anil's (from 8th standard) name kept cropping up as the kabaddi champion. Aakash's name cropped up for being a potential DJ. When I would ask them what they wanted to be, they would stick with 'farmer'. There wasn't tremendous ambition amongst students or feelings of envy/jealousy either. Thus I was doubting if ambition or desire in that sense would work as an encouragement. I later discussed some of these thoughts, in way of questions with Ulka tai and she seemed to agree. Hardly did she find competition or envy or ambition amongst the kids.

We did the Warli dance, I participated drawing from my Garba moves (Anisha taught Garba last November) It was fun. A bon fire around which most kids and adults danced hand in hand. I tried making videos but that kept me from participating so I let it be. It's very important to participate and be one with them. Not wearing slippers, having food on the floor among other things helps to be on the same page.

Santosh Ji tells me that tribals have protection against their land, non-tribals can't own land here, they can only take it on rent. Whilst renting it they do better by planting cash crops but tribals don't do so.

Tuesday

The next day they asked me about where I had come from, so I described IIT. I spoke of the crocodiles in the lake and the leopards that pay us annual visits, of snakes and of the 2km radius. Played a little with the kids, especially Kris (5th standard) who insisted I catch him. When I showed them images of last night or of dahanu they really enjoy it. When I show them videos of them playing or studying they love it beyond measure. It shows that technology and media holds fancy, good visuals and better videos hold even more attraction and attention. The video of last night's dance was really dark because there wasn't any light source and the ISO limitations of camera came in the way. They enjoyed the sound and video element but they liked videos with better aesthetic. This suggests that they are very mindful of aesthetic and quality even if they may not have come across a lot of it.

The assembly was uneventful for the most part. She remarked on the confidence of students again. They used to be scared of anyone who wore clothes, these kids have learnt to trust animals more than humans because they have been betrayed by humans more often (Zamindari system). They

would look down while talking or hide away. Girls have it harder.

I attended another one of Santosh Ji's english class, this one with 6th standard. He started with words related to the five senses. They were made to repeat after him the words without giving explanations of the words. It's odd that such simple words aren't explained either, they don't need a dictionary. Most of them can be explained by giving examples. Lemon is sour for instance. I was wondering at this point, how do you contextualise something so simple? All of them did not repeat after him. He then divided the kids into two groups. One group was asked to look up the meanings of these words using an english to marathi dictionary while the other group he took inside the classroom. This group was taught spellings using alphabet cards. Here I saw that owing to translative english children would spell the english words in the same way as they spelled the word in marathi. Hence read becomes red. Santosh ji starts his lesson with english but switches to marathi all too quickly. While facilitating spellings he would give words of encouragement in english initially but soon go into marathi. In an english class I didn't hear any english. I went to check on the kids who were supposed to look for word meanings in the dictionary but nothing was happening. Except

Sanjay no one was even looking at the dictionaries. They weren't chatting amongst themselves or having a gala time either. They were simply idle. The group of students that were engaged in finding spellings were from zilla parishad schools. They had problems identifying 'p' and 'q', 'b' and 'd'. It was often difficult to assess whether the wrong letter was picked because of poor identification skills or poor spelling skills. Santosh Ji does not employ rules to explain spellings. Like 'i' before 'e' except after c. He keeps on repeating the word as the student is making up the word. There is little structure thus. The words picked for spelling were too simple by general standards. They were two to four letter words at best.

In the mess there is a board stating that grammangal is bilingual, i.e English and marathi. I see that there are sign boards or labels everywhere, however, they are all in marathi. The only place where I see English words being used as labels is the English classroom. It would be a good idea to label the entire school in English as well. Just as students have learnt Marathi after coming here it would help to have english labels all over the school.

At lunch I noticed a stark difference between the way urban people operate. A total disregard for queues. The bus driver was in the queue as two

teachers just jumped him. :(Grammangal kids don't even do that amongst each other. The bus conductor was invisible to those ladies. Thus the kids are definitely well mannered and all. Cleaning your own plate allows you to be more mindful of how much food you are wasting. The dustbin in the hall is practically empty meaning that food is valued immensely for various reasons. If IIT students had to clean their own plates food wastage would reduce significantly. :) When I was discussing IIT, I was surprised to know that not only the children but even the teachers are not aware of IIT. How would they desire alternate futures if they don't know much about the possibilities. IIT was one example, the next day on the trip to the village I started to see that this alternate future that we speak of is hardly fleshed out. They are not even aware of these possibilities.

There is no homework given to students which has its merits and demerits. When I talk to children and ask questions about languages they like and dislike english comes across as a subject rather than a language. I wonder that if the alternate futures aren't thought of then a big question mark on English comes in. I asked children why they learn english or whether they should learn english. Most of the kids would say that they need to learn english but would stop at that, get all shy and not elaborate. Those who did elaborate said that it is needed to speak to outsiders and foreign visitors. The possibilities that English allows don't seem to be a part of their consciousness.

Today I saw that kids were busy with cleaning the entire school from 9 to 12. Studies start after 12 on a day which is declared half day owing to last

night's stay. The school was going to be extended only if visitors came. The visitors didn't come so children left earlier than 5. Later Mr Ajith Mandlik came with some people and I had a chance to speak with him. He showed the visitors a room where all the activities were catalogued in drawers based on the lesson that those aids could be used to teach. Later he showed how the architecture (jalis, high ceiling) allowed for ventilation and light to come in even when there was no electricity. Apparently they are trying to open a centre to record the art, music and dance traditions of the tribal people. There are 6 computers that aren't put to use because there are infrastructural problems (I seriously doubt it though). Visitors do hamper the overall working of the school as teachers leave class to assist them, show them around. Students must feel the pressure of the gaze as well, where people keep interrupting their class. They are used to it though and go about their work almost unfazed. Donation comes from visitors so...

Mandlik asked me to converse with Santosh Ji in English in order that his spoken English improves and asked Santosh to make that effort irrespective of the grammar aspect. Santosh Ji tried to speak to me in English from then on and I encouraged it albeit subtly. I was curious to know how much difference lay between Marathi and Warli, Marathi and Malhar Kudi etc. It turns out that there is significant difference. All the kids are taught marathi to be brought on the same page. While the official medium of instruction is english and marathi, only Marathi is taught from the start. My question is why to even start with Marathi as the base, why not english? His response is. Their way of teaching English is a translative approach. The show actions to students to explain prepositions. Santosh Ji did his

B.A in English but hardly went to college despite it being a regular course. Owing to his economic conditions he worked with an NGO that was working with child labourers. (He has written a song as well).

Santosh Ji discussed his various attempts to improve his english, MP3 players amongst them. We decided to talk more about the recordings. The MP3 is shuffle only, which is very paralysing (obviously). It doesn't have the feature to forward or go back so if he misses something owing to the accent or poor concentration he can't go back on it. He complained about certain recordings that he wasn't comfortable with. I inquired more about said recordings, but he was at a loss to tell which they were. He likes Gayatri Aptekar because of the familiar accent, pacing and expression. Unable to identify the recordings he faced problems with I requested him to find them in order that more can be learnt from this. Santosh Ji is critical of government school teachers, he believes that most of them are too busy with file work and ill treat children. They have such low expectations from tribal children that it in turn disappoints the children. There are teachers who believe that tribal children are destined for failure, hence they end up discouraging children. Furthermore, several children join Grammangal when they don't get admission in other schools.

Santosh Ji took me to the brick making site in the evening along with his colleague (he teaches english to 4th standard). The brick making site had lots of kids working, baking, moulding. Several children from school work there as well.

Wednesday

Next morning I was planning on going to Rangkod village where I'd be greeted by Aakash and Akshay. The children at grammangal were given an off on Wednesday in lieu of Sunday. I was really excited for the trip since it would be a closer encounter with the students. I was surprised when one of the teachers Ms. Ulka tai decided to join us. Honestly, I wasn't particularly excited about this new development. She was a teacher, a familiar figure that shared a different dynamic with the kids, I didn't want my interaction with them to be affected by her. Even as it was an enriching experience, I still think it would be much different if it was just me vs me and her. It's quite possible that the children and their families would have opened up less, moreover people tend to say things that the stranger wants to hear. Ulka tai's presence allowed for the family members to discuss their everyday concerns perhaps. She was visiting the(a) village for the first time as well so the language barrier would be the only factor. It was a significant factor though, I had to put in significant effort to be a part of the conversations, getting cue from familiar marathi, hindi or english words that would be part of their talk.

We took a jeep from Aina upto Rangkod and were greeted by Aakash and akshay. On the way we saw their Zilla Parishad school. The school had two small classrooms that held 150 kids under the small roof. Classes 1 & 3 and 2 & 4 were clubbed together, each group taken by one teacher. It is clear that the open grounds and huge classrooms would have been a relief for these children in comparison to the claustrophobic rooms in the Z.P school. Akshay later confessed that he liked grammangal because lots of classes were held outdoors. We asked lots of questions about trees and plants around. We saw a variety of trees like dates, tari, palm, in, tamarind among others. Akshay's father is a vaid, (Ayurveda doctor) he was giving an Ayurvedic dosage to someone with sorosis. He confessed that he could identify a tree and it's use but not name or record it. I tried to find the source of this education in medicine but they were noncommittal about it. Later we spotted a bird called Bharadwaj. Bharadwaj is one of the many birds that is hunted by tribal people here. Rabbits, pigeons, other birds, boars, chicken among others are hunted by kids themselves (not boar though) with their slingshots. Akshay doesn't kill birds anymore but lots of kids still do it, Anil and Mangesh for instance. On the way I talked to akshay about school and his family. He has 4 brothers and 1 sister. His sister was the eldest and married

without receiving any education. His eldest brother dropped out after 7th and works in a brick making place while Mukesh has done '13th' and works in a pharmaceutical company. Akshay who is in 8th standard has two younger siblings in 4th standard. He wants to study more and yet he wants to be a farmer only. Akshay is popular as a 'DJ' owing to his skills (actually it's not much) with the harmonium. I encouraged him to perhaps pursue it but he simply smiled. Aakash is engaged in conversation with Ulka ma'am. I had to slow Akshay down to be able to have this conversation otherwise it was becoming this monologue with Ulka only. Akshay's schedule entails walking or cycling all the way to school which takes anything between 45min to 1.5hrs. After getting back from school he washes his uniform, plays a little and helps his parents in watering the plants as well as the field (other farming chores). It is clear that the boys really love school, they wouldn't take such pains otherwise. The boys leave us at Shubhangi's house (8th standard girl) where we were to have lunch and meet more people. :)

Shubhangi's family has their own set of problems. Shubhangi's eldest brother died in an accident and after that they turned to Christianity to manage their grief. They used to be believers of Sai Baba but they no longer believe in him because they

never had enough to eat and were surrounded by problems when they believed in him, things have changed since then. I sense a clash between the teacher and Sunita, Shubhangi's elder sister. Ulka tai insists on stating and restating that Sai Baba is as good if not better than Christ (fairly unnecessary in my opinion). The makeshift church with their sermons and books allowed them to deal with their grief better. Sunita works in Bhaisor under a tailor (she does rafoo). She left school in 8th standard to support her father. She and her brother left school early to support their father but want their siblings to study further. Despite having the exposure of the city Sunita spends very limited time with technology, she reads the bible instead (it's not the entire bible but a small booklet in marathi that covers certain teachings, it's mandatory to read it). She does not have access to the internet and doesn't really know why it should be used. On being asked the importance of English, she gives rather vague responses. You need english in case you are lost somewhere and need to get back home (?). She insists that even the Oriya people at the office (tailor shop) use hindi or marathi. The higher up officials are the only ones who speak in English. Sunita is in bad shape, physically, she was attacked by a bull and has several stitches. She is on bed rest for a month and she spends her free time reading the bible. She admits that her siblings were sent to grammangal because they couldn't get admission anywhere else. We have a lunch of rice, dal and sprite. Sunita stays with her maternal uncle, while her uncle's son stays with Shubhangi in the village. I was suggesting that lots of knowledge can be obtained over the internet which may be cheaper than college education (they perceive college education as beyond their

reach), they acknowledge this without any response. English is thought of as just another subject even by the sister who has studied in town. Shubhangi makes the meals and is quiet throughout. I make a sketch of the family to make things easier, and it does indeed allow the sister to share more freely, openly. Later I ask the children, Sagar in particular, to teach me the use of a slingshot (My sports abilities may be poor but they are consistent in being so :P). The slingshot is clearly a significant artefact of their life and worth consideration. It is in this house that I saw how the concerns of the family are not dominated by education, education is an after thought in some ways. Religion has taken centre stage somehow. We part and are encouraged to come again, after all they are known to be very accommodating (just as we leave we are told the story of how Shubhangi's mother created a meal out of sweet oil, rice and garlic for a visitor). We are accompanied by Shubhangi, Sagar and their niece. I don't know where we are headed but it is some tunnel (it isn't as we later find out).

We walk along the canal for quite some time, find a dead snake in the canal. We bond over a packet of chips some biscuits and the scorching sun and go down the road to a place where the canal meets the road. After clicking some pictures, Sagar climbs a tree to get these flowers whose stalks can be used to whistle, after several attempts all of us are whistling to no particular tune. The children aren't greedy, there is this one extra biscuit that I give to Sagar but he gives it to his niece instead. We come across other children on the way, discuss their eating habits (apparently peacock is the tastiest meat). Around 4:30 we decide to go back to the stop, I try to engage in conversation with Shubhangi particularly in

English. She seems to understand me but is very hesitant in responding, when she does respond it isn't terribly off but it takes a lot of probing to get the response out of her (it's a really long walk back). I want to get some chocolates for the kids, all they have is 'kiss me' so I just buy them that. The jeep back to Aina has no seats so I go back hanging holding to dear life (it was exhilarating somewhat).

Later, Ulka tai shared her life experiences. (I can share them but they aren't very relevant here except a few). She taught marathi in several schools and was a pupil of one of the founders of Grammangal. It is only after retirement that she joined this institution. She taught in a convent with little knowledge of English. She considers herself to be a person who can't bear injustice against students. She overcame her low confidence attributed to poor facility with English by speaking in English anyway, allowing others to correct her. We discussed that similar encouragement or driving force is required for students to speak in English, to think of it as a medium of communication, a language rather than a subject. After attending English classes it seems to me that they can read and write English but they lack the confidence, necessity and desire to speak it. When students speak in Marathi at the assembly they do so hesitatingly. They do it anyway because it is a language spoken by the teachers, it is the language of instruction and it is around them significantly more than Hindi or English. I ask her about plays, and if they have tried to do any. Fortunately they have tried to do a play on environment with several kids participating even if it is in small capacities (tree, bird, flower). The idea of a play starts to flesh out more in my mind. The play can be designed in a way that the main characters of one play become

mentors to the main characters in the next play. Playing on the idea that less ambition and jealousy may allow them to take to mentorship easily. The initial stories can be from the ones they have made and already visualised or straight from book box stories. It could then move to graver more relevant topics that are in their setting. Ma'am also tells me that they are taking steps in the right direction vis-a-vis the assembly. The student body has been formed to decide on the topics and make a big event of it where all the students perform together to create a collective assembly on a central theme.

She did another play in another school, the play centred around three points.

- a. Students going to the brick factory instead of school.
- b. Girls getting married instead of going to school.
- c. Seeking help from village vaid instead of a certified doctor.

The play was translated into *katkari* by one of the school children and performed later. Ulka reminisces of a girl who said she wanted to be like her. Later she found out that this girl was married. On meeting the girl's mother Ulka found out that the girl was married off by her grandmother and the village people when her parents were away at the brick making site. She spoke of Baba Amte and his transformation that enabled him to help tribals. Ulka was in a residential school where kids would hang out in the forest instead of their dormitory. She would spend time in the forest as well where the kids would approach her (it took some time though). These kids asked her about a range of things from aids to alcohol. She was trying to suggest that in order to get closer to children one

has to adopt the ways of children. I don't know if this subtle suggestion was the reason, but I stopped wearing shoes and just walked barefoot. (I don't know how they run barefoot. seriously!).

Thursday

During the assembly Sagar spoke about our visit to the village. It was more of a report.

Thursday was the day when a hundred teachers showed up for teacher training. The teachers at grammangal were tied up with this training session and the children were running all over the place. Santosh ji was conducting fascinating experiments like a rocket that worked based on pressure, a boat that moved due to toothpaste and rainbow on the screen using refraction concepts. He was demonstrating the experiments very well, without giving good scientific explanations for the same. More worrisome was the fact that the teachers weren't asking anything either. Everything was an exhibit for them teachers. They'd peep in classes instead of just observing closely. I wanted to talk to individual students to test out their alphabet identification skills but also to get to know them better. I would ask them to recognise the alphabet and tell a few words that start with the same alphabet.

The following possibilities arose

a. The student identified the alphabet but knew only one word that starts with it, Z for Zebra for instance

b. The student identified the alphabet correctly and could give 2-3 words that used the alphabet like M for mango, mirror and man,

c. The student identified the alphabet correctly and told several words that had the letter in different usage like c for cap cut cat and city

d. The student identifies the letter but gives Hindi or Marathi words to suggest the sounds like m for mangesh, maize

e. The students identifies the letter but mixes it with words of a different letter like v for window, k for cut, cat, crow,

I also asked them about their favorite movie and dialogue. I promised that I'd act out a dialogue if they acted out one. It did work. :) One of the kids told me that they prefer hindi over marathi and warli because it has the maximum words. Ulka tai thinks that some kids favor Hindi over marathi because Hindi as shorter essays. Moreover their Hindi and sports teacher is the same. She also tells that students find marathi hard especially when the question entails expressions of your own personal views.

I was unable to interview a lot of these kids because there were visitors and the math teacher asked me to help in handing a 7th standard class. They had a music lesson but the teacher was absent. I went to

the 7th standard class and tried to get introductions out of the girls. Just their name and favorite movie. They just left one by one. It was so strange. They just giggled and left.

The boys wanted to hear the story, all of them seem to have a liking for Akshay Kumar in Rowdy Rathore. I told them the story of the Wizard of Oz with some improvisations. For certain words I made them look up the word in the dictionary (they weren't very pleased with this, wicked for instance). I also made them shriek like a witch, roar like a lion and tap their feet like Dorothy. Shruti asked them to draw scenes from the story and gave them papers to do so. It's very difficult to know whether they are enjoying the story or not. It's so easy to make them repeat a word for instance. I couldn't assess whether that repetition came from a place of excitement or 'training'. It is certain that they enjoy dramatic things like roars and shrieks.

Later Santosh Ji and I sat with the mp3 recordings. He said that he found the radio lab recordings harder to get and process. He thinks so because the accents are difficult and everything is too fast for him to process. Other feature of radio lab pod-casts that make them different from regular pod-casts is that the sound evokes lots of visual memory. Ma'am had mentioned this film where people talk

simultaneously unlike a typical film where one character waits for the other character to wait before they respond. Radio lab has overlapping voices, clubbed with sounds of location that give context. Santosh ji did not complain about overlapping voices or extra sounds. He complained of accents and pacing. Also, radiolab podcasts are somewhat long (39-50minutes) and they refer to information or ideas that they mention before. He finds it hard to keep track of these references especially if he loses concentration somewhere in the middle. In my personal opinion radiolab podcasts are very nice. I asked him to say out loud whatever he has heard by frequently pausing the recording. Allowing his daughter to be the listener. The incentive for him to do this maybe more because he is aware that exposure to english will improve his daughter's english. We also discuss Howard Gardner and his theory of multiple intelligences.

Friday

I attended the math class for 5th standard. She divided the children into three groups based on their ability. There is a lot of disparity between grammangal kids and Zilla parishad kids. She is teaching the z.p kids concepts that should've been taught in 3rd standard. She teaches them perimeter by taking real objects and attributing personal touch by saying 'Perimeter of kris's box'. She demonstrates one entire exercise after which she asks them to do it themselves, collectively if required. The overall math is the same but it becomes significantly interesting and measurable. You can confirm your answer by just measuring the box with metre tape for instance (not that anyone uses it). She teaches division with the help of stones, bottle caps and marbles. Every student is given personal attention. They write sums with chalk on the floor. It's a very interesting way of teaching maths. What is troublesome here is that the entire lecture is in marathi, the class has labels in marathi but the numbers are not written in the devanagri script, therefore everything is in dyanagri and marathi but the numerical quantities aren't. Following this the 6th standard had a singing period which was free once again. Word of my storytelling had spread throughout

the school (maybe) and they wanted to hear a story too. It was the last day and I wanted to experiment and see what these kids would do vis-a-vis acting, speaking, listening. I suggested that instead of me telling the story, everyone continues on the line spoken by the last person. One girl literally shouted at me saying 'Kahani sunani hai toh sunao nahi toh jao'. They were not ready to be content creators in this case. I decided to tell the same story with certain twists. A sweet girl Sarika allowed to become dorothy, henceforth there was no dorothy in the story only Sarika. A girl became the cyclone, yet another became house. Everyone was asked to get their feet close together the way Sarika did. The students like the seventh standards before them enjoyed the witch's shrieks. They enjoyed the lions's roars as well. Here the kids would repeat a word only if they felt like so. Some kids became busy men in the village while others became witches and warlocks. All in all several kids got to play small parts and they did enjoy the impromptu play cum storytelling exercise.

I said my goodbyes and was given decorative things they make out of grass.



