

**CULP'S Educational Project in Rural Rajasthan:  
A Socio-Pedagogical Reflection**

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I was given an opportunity to visit a project run by Centre for Unfolding Learning Potentials (CULP) working on minority girl's education in rural Rajasthan accompanied by Dr. Lalit Kishore and Mr. Mohammed Iqbal from CULP organization. Girls being targeted (age group 9 to 18 years) under Pehchan Project belong to socially excluded, minority Muslim communities where female literacy and school attendance have been at low rate (80% girls being out-of-school) due to reasons varying from male-dominance and gender discrimination to early and forced marriages.

The classes in Pehchan Shalas – the single-teacher bridge schools - are either for non-starters or those who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of school system. The aim is to provide girls with intensified quality education to bridge the gaps between them and mainstream students (Pehchan Project, culpraj.org). Currently, CULP is running 10 bridge schools based on three-level and three-stage learning strategy in the interior villages and habitations of Niwai block of rural Rajasthan. Children learn three-grouped at different levels and undergo three stages of learning, namely, the teacher-directed learning; peer group learning; and individual practice through learning task sheets.

During the visit we dropped by two Pehchan Project bridge school classes, one government mainstream school class and one six-month compensatory education class. Based on the observations as well as articulated and profound information from Dr. Kishore, this report will introduce some notions from socio-pedagogical viewpoint with focus on ownership of learning and teaching processes, relationship-centered orientation, community inclusion and creation of safe and convivial spaces for learning and growing.

The visit was organized in Field Operation Seminar format (Kishore, 2018b) which was shared on the way to the five field sites identified for the visit, viz., field centre at Jillay; Pehchan Shala at Khirki; Government Senior Secondary School, Khirki; and compensatory education centre in Niwai.

Besides observing the activities being undertaken by CULP, various field functionaries were interacted with and the learning materials were seen with a view to identify the elements of social pedagogy incorporated in the project components and more so in the school setting.

**Social pedagogical viewpoint**

Social pedagogy is an academic discipline working in social and educational settings, from formal to informal to non-formal sectors. Drawing theories and concepts from various related disciplines such as education,

sociology, social work and philosophy, it has developed its own, well-established framework with focus on growth, education, care and holistic wellbeing. Rather than set of methods, social pedagogy as a value-based and relationship-centered orientation of thinking and working brings together three aspects central to every human: individual level, community level and societal level.

At an individual level, the growth of an individual towards unique and wellbeing personality occurs by fulfilling the needs and developing recognized potentials. However, this process is always to be seen in a social context, in relation to other people. Our social nature connects us to other people, and those relationships and communities one belongs to are to be nurtured. Communities enriching personal growth and strengthening connection and belonging not only are in constant endeavour and aspiration towards dialogue, solidarity, recognition and empathy, but take them as baseline.

The outermost circle on the context of growth is the societal level. Educational and care processes take place in society with an aim of socialization of an individual towards true, active citizenship. Due to socio-pedagogical value of mutualism, the relationship between individual and society is left incomplete when only integration as adaptation to the existing order is to be supported. Instead, integration together with emancipation enables and brings about the social change towards a more human and just society. Conclusively, social pedagogy is an ethical orientation towards working with people and for the people.

Social pedagogy has two developmental lines, the general and the special. Within the broader, general social pedagogical line, focus is in the growth and socialization processes of each and every one to be supported whereas special pedagogical social work deals with social problems such as exclusion and marginalization, by working with people in vulnerable position from a pedagogical point of view. (Hämäläinen 2012, 95.) CULP Pehchan Project has elements from both developmental lines.

On the one hand, it targets socially excluded minority girls with the aspiration of improving their wellbeing and inclusion in the society (special developmental line). On the other hand, by setting pedagogical targets, project aims to contribute to socialization in order to strengthen growth towards true citizenship (general developmental line).

Although not claiming its orientation or work namely as socio-pedagogical, the Pehchan Project proves – both in words and praxis – to implement various conceptual and theoretical ideas central to social pedagogy. Already the starting point, claiming basic human rights for marginalized girls is to be seen as a socio-political act mitigating inequality and social exclusion and taking a step towards societal inclusion.

As in CULP website (Pehchan Project, [culpraj.org](http://culpraj.org)) it is stated, sensitizing the local communities and governmental school system for social and gender equity issues has targets not only in mainstreaming

minority girls to enter the realm of the well-off (adaptation), but in the larger scale generating social change by liberation from oppressive power structures (emancipation).

Adolescent girls' forums called Kishori Manchs are a great example of growth towards reflective, critical and active citizenship where various obstacles that those girls face while pursuing further in their education, are to be addressed, in order to enhance self-confidence and self-esteem.

### **Ownership of learning/teaching processes and peer-group learning**

Taking examples from the Pehchan Project bridge schools, the girls in age group 9 to 18 years are divided into three groups according to their learning processes. The teaching and learning is implemented at three stages: individual learning with individualized learning materials (portfolios), peer-group learning within the group and teacher-directed learning. The process of learning is individual and therefore, self-pace is emphasized.

In Pehchan Project, learning is not tied into common curriculum but proceeds based on the resources, abilities and progress of each learner to meet individual learning objectives. With self-pacing, achievements are to be evaluated and compared only in comparison to the earlier performances of oneself, which strengthens the ownership of learning processes, develops the thinking and learning skills and accordingly, creates confidence and internal motivation in learning. Self-paced learning from socio-pedagogical viewpoint in the context of group learning processes develops social and cooperative skills when mutual support in teaching and learning is taking place. Not to forget the shared joy of learning and teaching!

When I make a question concerning the learning materials, Dr. Kishore points out very clearly that the teachers are the ones to produce those materials. "They are not consumers but producers, the teaching material has to be matching with the needs and characteristics of each child to prove relevant", he clarifies. With help from the mainstream school material, teachers provide those individualized learning materials for their students. Focus is on individual learning process, not in relation to the peer-group although some of the materials are to be shared and systematized. A lot of learning material is put on the walls with colours, text, visuals, shapes – dual code learning, e.g. by linking visuals to text, is proved to be more efficient in learning to most of us.

Ownership of learning/teaching processes and the co-creation of knowledge has been discussed also with a concept of problem-based learning model stemming from pedagogue Paulo Freire. In contrary to banking model of education, where students are seen as containers for knowledge to be poured in the problem-based learning model that reinforces critical thinking, active learning and knowledge ownership in students leading to liberation. In addition to critical thinking, act must follow – here the example of adolescent girls' forum in taking ownership in their education is to be mentioned anew.

### **Relationship-centred orientation**

Relationships between individuals and their micro and macro communities are crucial in social pedagogy. Humans are born as social animals, growing in social interaction that is to be called upbringing. In

pedagogical context, learning, happiness and empowerment are possible outcomes depending to the most extent on the relationships that we grow in. In CULP's bridge schools, the relationship-centered orientation is in all the levels: student - student, student - teacher, teacher - community, teacher - organisational level, even extending to socio-political dimensions when working with for example state government of Rajasthan. However, with the emphasis on the classroom and community context, the relationships between students and teachers are uttermost important for the learning processes.

For CULP, providing quality education is related to promising outcomes by motivated teaching and learning. Quality in teaching is first and foremost about relationships between those in the classroom. In Pehchan project bridge schools, what was immediately notable, were the close-knit, trustworthy and joyful relationships. Girls formed small peer groups, where not only learning, but sharing of life, happens. Cooperative learning not only benefits the students in accomplishing their learning tasks but social learning environment strengthens the community, enables the feeling of belonging by participation, develops the democratic skills, dialogue skills, care and empathy.

Girls called the teacher as *didi*, big sister, in avoidance of creating and reinforcing the hierarchical power relations between authority and the students. The teacher, partly due to three stages of learning (individual/peer group/teacher-directed), is to be seen as co-learner, rather a facilitator of learning than the highest authority remaining distant to the students. Social pedagogical theorist Herman Nohl has developed a concept of pedagogical relationship between two subjects combined with mutual love in pedagogical understanding. The teacher as an educator has to balance with setting the educational objectives for the students, still allowing space for self-education and self-determination. Pedagogical relationship requires sensitivity, creativity, discretion and ability to empathise. (Hämäläinen 2017.)

After the scheduled school days, teacher is providing remedial teaching for some of the girls, finishing the day by outreaching to the community in order to strengthen the bonds and build transparency and trust. The proactive role of the community from the very beginning in project intervention is ensured to make the intervention and project more sustainable for the community to take over (Pehchan Project, [culpraj.org](http://culpraj.org)).

Socio-pedagogically the inclusion of the community in the project is to be seen as positive exception in the field of education where most of the schools have very less communication with the surrounding community. Moreover, the role of the teacher is not solely – although most importantly – a teacher, but it has elements from school social work, community work, organisational work and therefore reaches the levels from individual to community to societal level – all bound around the concern of the minority girls' education and overall wellbeing.

In order to draw some core principles of relationship-centered orientation together, the elements of shared joy, respect, transparency, trust and true dialogue are present at Pehchan project education.

### **Creation of safe and convivial spaces for learning**

As a logical continuum to relationship-centered orientation, a space for learning with comfort, security and care has to be created in order to serve the learning processes. It was pointed out during the visit that allowing the girls to leave their houses for school was a worry among the community members. However, slowly and gradually the trust was built, followed by an act by the community to provide a space for teaching and learning to take place in the community area. According to the terms set by community members, a female teacher was placed in the community.

Although teaching and learning have seriousness in their targets, emphasis on 'joy of learning' is part of creating a comfortable space for learners. Convivial space is a concept adapted in social pedagogy with the meaning of a management of space, where the safe and dialogical environment nurtures the individual agency, sociability and ties in community. During the visit to one of the bridge schools I was told a story of local boys entering the school and damaging the classroom property. The reaction from the CULP was to resolve the case in the community, including the misbehaving boys, in order to preserve the trustworthy relationships and the comfort and safety of the classroom for the girls. In order to manage sustainably the outside intervention, the space management with elements of trust and safety is especially important. Classroom as a space is but physical, for the most, it requires to be created socially and systematically.

### **Discussion and implications**

A combination of social and instructional pedagogies, deliberately weaved into the school organisation, classroom processes and home-school links for the education of marginalized girls in the closed communities, is an approach to be supported for small habitations.

The implementation of social pedagogic principles requires a participatory approach in action planning and action learning. CULP has got a rich experience of running the multi-level approach to classroom organization and creating appropriate teaching-learning material with emergent needs. Creating opportunities for learning is the very nature of social pedagogy. Learning processes to be recognised as individual and unique, it is uttermost important especially in the case of intensified learning, to highlight individualized and self-paced learning with communal support instead of un-reflected, universalised and pre-determined technical methods in teaching.

However, in addition to individual portfolio keeping of students, standardisation of the instructional material is also needed in order to enhance the usage of teacher's resources in time management.

Some the implications from the lessons observed and from the overall experience suggested could be as follows:

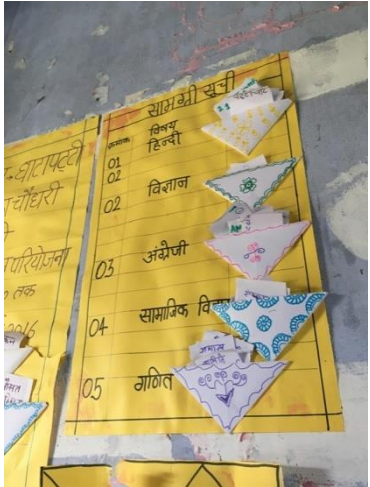



- In order to strengthen the social foundation of the centres, the students ought to be prepared for leadership roles such in the form of head-student and deputy head-student for the school and classroom management.
- Social pedagogy within school contexts encourages in forming student bodies/councils, in order to increase participation concerning the activities in the school and make a positive impact on the school and community environment. Students will learn democratic skills, such as dialogue, argumentation, and decision-making and gain first-hand understanding of how democracy functions by having a voice and a chance to contribute to some of the functioning of the school.
- Furthermore, in reaching out of school to the community, students will gain experience in public speaking by interacting with the community leaders and voicing their opinions for the school's welfare.
- Learning expeditions in social setting and nearby areas should be organized along with building the inter-school bonding. The social learning distances should be normalized so the children learn to sit properly in circles and semi-circles. Group games need to encourage for team work and learning of rules for coordinated actions.

According to Kishore (2018b), social pedagogy could be applied as a component or even larger framework of teacher training and school organisation so the schools work as the community of learners within a larger community that utilises the community resources and community skills for the cause of optimised learning by the children of the community.

Kishore further states that social pedagogy in school setting emphasizes the person-to-person equitable relationship between teachers and taught in the same life space as against the school as a hierarchical structure. In other words the school is seen as a micro-community of learners with teacher as a mature co-learners with students. Moreover, the school is seen as a web of equitable relationships with centrality of children's education and wellbeing.

Thus, school functions in the framework for social care and learning needs of children as a precondition to their learning. With research based knowledge generation and drawing strength from other knowledge areas, social pedagogy has become a discipline and area of professional practice concerned with addressing inequities in social life space and learning of by children across their ability continuum, Kishore observes.

Exhibit 1. The boxes showing the classroom display

	
1.1 Pocket boards for words	1.2 Charts: textual & visual
	
1.3 Information about children/school	1.4 Children's progress chart

Class room environment is text and visual rich using teacher-made charts, artefacts and display through pocket charts and student progress charts.





1.1 Pocket boards for words; new vocabulary is presented

1.2 Chart textual; by linking textual material to visuals, dual-code method for more efficient learning process is emphasized

1.3 Information about children/school; information about the attendance of students and their levels; names of the students on slips; information about mainstreamed students

1.4 Children's progress chart; information about progress related to subjects

## Exhibit 2. Students at learning tasks

	
2.1 File of Individual learning	2.2 Peer-group learning
	
2.3 Teacher-directed learning	2.4 Incidental learning (e.g. visitors)

Three-stage learning is organised in 15 minute episodes. It is based on pre-planned micro-learning model meaning that each day episodes have been planned and decided beforehand.

### 2.1 *Individual learning; individualized learning sheets produced by teacher*

In the individual learning sheets, students do the written practice of their learning of what they have understood through the efforts of the teacher and the peer-tutor. The process of individual learning is systematised through worksheets. The completed worksheets are allowed to be taken home to be shown to the caregivers before they are put in student's portfolio. The worksheets are also used for revision before the periodical formative tests.

### 2.2 *Peer-group learning*

In this mode of learning, no written work is done, but learning is based on discussion and non-written cognitive exercises.



In the peer group learning, the activities related to reading, speaking, singing, listening and seeking clarifications are done. At time the worksheets related to word puzzles and exercises of matching, sequencing, circling and ticking are given to enhance the cognitive skills.

### **2.3 Teacher-directed learning**

In the teacher-directed learning, the mode classroom instruction is through demonstration and presentation of information in an interesting way – orally, through charts, by singing etc.

The teacher teaches at the micro-level on the pre-decided and planned learning episode each day. The teacher directed mini-lessons are produced at the end of the day for the next day. This is the part of the teacher's role and one hour is set aside for it each day. At times, a senior student helps the teacher for material management for the day.

2.4 Incidental learning; visitors in class provide an opportunity for exchange of knowledge and a shared experience of togetherness

The visitors to the school are welcomed and they are requested to share their knowledge and skill with the student. At times, the community skills are invited to the school to build the bond between the school and the community. Also, educational excursion and learning expeditions are organised with the support of the community and donors.

### **Epilogue**

The project has elements of instructional pedagogy integrated into the classroom practices and teacher development through a month-long residential training in the pedagogy of multi-level learning and monthly review and meetings.

Bringing girls of minority marginalized community to the fold of education as first generation learners requires intensive social mobilisation and needs analysis which was done by the NGO to bring the project to an acceptance level with the community demanding the education of girls to secondary and senior secondary levels.

Though the elements of social pedagogy in terms of a web of relationships between various role actors and stakeholders were seen, however, this aspect needs to be systematised by its inclusion through teacher training and integration in the school plan as well as monitoring component during monthly review and planning meeting.

The NGO also requires keeping in touch with their alumni through visits to the schools they have been mainstreamed in at grade nine and provide them support for success in their periodic examinations.

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### Links for further reading on CULP and its learning model

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