



## **ABOUT US**

Isai Ambalam School is an outreach school of Auroville (Pondicherry) that works with children in the villages around Auroville including Kottakarai, Alankuppaam, Pettai, Edayanchavadi, Poothurai, Pattannur.

We currently work with around 135 children from 3 years to about 14 years of age, i.e., Kindergarten through Grade 8. We aspire to be a school based on the ideas of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother in providing an environment where children and teachers reach their highest potential. We believe in unending education, learning through doing and by fostering a collaborative learning community.

The school addresses not only the students academic needs, but also the needs in critical skills, competencies and values. We believe that working on the foundation of values and critical skills in the context of life and Education by Design (EBD) projects support both the curricular needs as well as a holistic education that we aspire to provide as an

Auroville school. There are over 10 engineers who volunteer at the school working with the children on STEM activities.

## **Education by Design (EBD) Projects in the last term**

### **Photography Exhibition**

Iffat Nawaz, a development writer, worked with the 5th graders, children on learning photography and writing in English. Some notes from her photography follow:

I didn't start with any expectations when I started the class on photography and creative writing. What guided us was not to create a desired result but rather letting the path reveal the outcomes and the impact. After all, children are experts of living in the moment.

Together with STEM land teachers, we have built 3 Big-Shot cameras shared by the students, we would also eventually build the bamboo frames for the exhibition.



I saw the children here are already drawn to nature, their values and teachings had already started to build their personalities. My job was to give them a tool and teach them a few photographic techniques to compose frames to what they as an individual found purpose in and in that process create their own visual identities.

Through our time together, I noticed their voices have stopped shaking when expressing their joy, confusion, love, frustration and observations in English and as one child remarked 'my hands don't shake anymore'.

Then there is the element of really seeing how we have all increased awareness, observation skills, learned camera technology, and the value of time, space and light while telling stories visually.



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## Food festival

Children from 1st grade and 2nd grade had a challenge in finding variety of foods. We took that as an EBD(Education By Design) to have a food festival. First, we collected details of food and we estimated the time it would take. Every day in the afternoon for a week we worked on the presentation, understanding ingredients, the advantage of the food Selected by children, etc. The children involved their parents to learn about the food at home and to show in the EBD. The children presented not only of ingredients, but also their nutritional value and looked at which foods provide many benefits vs those that do not. They did this through sharing and listening to each others, learning in a collaborative and peer learning process.

Children learned and shared for e.g. that rice is carbohydrate rich (energy)and they learned about a few vegetables and what the vitamins in them are useful for.



In the final presentation, every child brought different food they eat at home and spoke about it. As teachers we felt the children were able to learn much more than what is

given in the book and connect to their life and home through this EBD.

## Elephant Model

4th grade children made a paper model of Elephants. “A Day With Nandu” is a story of an Elephant in their EVS text book. Children were excited to learn about them. They saw a documentary on Elephants. Children learned many facts about them. As a part of Saturday school, the children wanted to make a fairly large Elephant with Papier-mâché.



To stabilize the elephant we made a frame from plywood and then filled in the elephant with Papier-mâché. It took time, but it was fun for them to see it coming up piece by piece bodies, legs, ears and tails of Elephant. They then colored the elephant.

## Speed Distance and Time

Children in V grade worked on an EBD to get an understanding of speed, distance and time. We started with an experiment to find out the running speed of children.

Children measured 40 meters using measuring tape and put stones in every two meters. Children ran one by one and measured their speed using a stopwatch in

mobile. Children interestingly participated and ran more than one time. They compared all their speeds and took the minimum speed.

Children used Speed Radar Meter an instrument which detects the speed and everyone found their running speed and cycling speed. Every child took turns and learned to use the new tool. Children were interested to find their speeds in the Speed Gun.



To get a sense of the speed we thought of finding the speed of different animals. Children made presentations of the speed of different animals. This is the first time that children were doing presentations. After that, the children found the speed of some of the birds and plotted them in a chart. Two children also found the rotating speed of planets and also plotted them in the chart.

## Making a clock

To allow 4<sup>th</sup> graders a chance to track the time they spend on different activities we were helping them learn know how to read time. We spent an entire class in understanding how time works and made

sure they knew how to read time from the clock. I also made sure that the children knew 5 multiplication tables to be able to tell the minutes. Children then wanted to build their own clock. They also were able to build their own clock and started to play and read the time from it.



## Making cakes

During the 1<sup>st</sup> term holiday some of the children came to school for half day for a week to learn something new. Children from 5<sup>th</sup> standard to 8<sup>th</sup> standard came to school. There were different groups doing different project and one of them was to cook in the kitchen.

In one week children learnt to prepare various healthy sweets likes Peanut laddoo, peanut cakes, ginger laddoo, plum cakes with egg and without egg and wheat cakes.

Students got the opportunity to work by themselves taking the ownership and



responsibility. They were given home work to prepare some of the sweets at home. They participated enthusiastically and worked at home also. They understood how to mix various ingredients in the right proportions to get delicious and healthy sweets. They understood the nutritional value of native foods. They also learned to prepare healthy alternatives for bakery products. We anticipated to become thorough in preparing more nutritional food recipes. After three days we started to make bakery items like plum cakes. Then we started to check whether the product that we make is healthy or not. We had a small discussion and at the end, we started to make healthy varieties likes egg-less, Whole wheat cakes.



After a week, we were celebrating STEM land birthday in Udavi school. The children from Isai Ambalam made four cakes (one each for S-T-E-M) to celebrate the birthday. The cake was one of the highlights of the birthday celebration.

## EBD on Igloo

I (Kavitha) was filling in for the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher, the children were studying different types of houses. They wanted to make a model of an Igloo house using clay. Before making the clay model, I asked them whether they had seen an Igloo. They all said that they have seen only the picture of

an Igloo house in the computer. I realized that they were curious about the Igloo and encouraged them to ask their questions about it. This is what they came up with

Why do people live in that type of house?  
What will they do when it rains?  
How many people can stay in the house?  
Why it is white in colour?  
What do they do if it gets cold?  
Who lives in that house?  
What types of clothes they wear?

It was really interesting to hear their questions and I gave them context and let them mull over it.



Then we started to make a model of an Igloo house. Each student started making the bricks with clay. Hariharan and Jagadeesh started to make the structure of the Igloo house. They took 2 class-hours to finish the Igloo house model. They felt it would be difficult to live in that type of house.

### **Earth Day**

We found some trash on the way to Isai Ambalam school.

We (STEM land team) decided to clean the place. As there was some excitement in what we were up to the children also joined us in cleaning.



We made a factory line where we cleaned and dried the plastic and were able to dry it and stack and segregate it.



### **World Map**

During the first term holidays children came to school to do differently EBD's. One of them was on History and Geography. To understand Geography and History better, we felt a physical world map would help us better.



Since 7th and 8th students were well versed with map making, we took a few students from other classes, so that they will also learn the skill of map making.

### **Procedure to make the World map:**

Challenge:

#### **Challenge 1: How to Draw World map accurately?**

- 1) We drew a proper rectangle on the floor using the right tool. Children learnt to use the right angle tool.
- 2). We divided the rectangle into 6 equal rectangles.
- 3) Each one was assigned the responsibility of drawing the world map in his box.
- 4) Each box was again divided into smaller boxes.
- 5) We took World map on A4 paper. Divided it into the same number of boxes we did on the rectangle.
- 6) Drawing the world map in a small box is much easier than drawing it bigger rectangle.

7) Through a divide and conquer approach we drew the world map on the floor accurately.



#### **Challenge 2: How to make a permanent world map?**



We addressed this by choosing the approach, raising the walls of the borders so that we can fill soil inside and can represent physical features well. How to get a border mold to fill cement on land boundaries? Was our next challenge. We decided to raise clay walls on the land-water boundaries. Then, with the clay support we cemented the outwards with inclination.

We filled the land part with soil.

We painted the ocean parts with blue paint to give it a natural look. Finally, it looks like this.

## **EBD on Preposition**

We noticed that 6<sup>th</sup> students are not able to use prepositions correctly. Children have been enjoying EBDs in math, science and social we decided to extend this in English. The challenge was called “Can you manage without that?”

Is it possible to speak and write without using these words (in, on, to, between, above, behind, up, near, at, from)? If the answer is ‘no’, create something to show why not?

We taught the prepositions we often use in our reading. They played some games and watched videos and wrote sentences using those preposition words.



They created a game of sorts with a model of an environment with various animals, plants, objects and created tags for each of the prepositions that the user could place at a place they thought appropriate and say the sentence. In the easier version of the game the children would say the sentences and the

user would need to find where the appropriate preposition needed to be placed.

They also prepared a picture chart and narrated their own sentences. We told them to write a simple story using those words. The students were divided into 3 groups and wrote a story.

We have chosen one story among them:

One day a girl went to the zoo. She went through the bridge. There she saw a cow eating plastic. She went near the cow. There was a donkey too. The donkey said, ‘a girl is coming behind you’, come, let us run. She chased the cow, and she became thirsty. She saw a well. She took water from the well and drank. There she saw a monkey on the tree. The monkey threw the fruit at the girl. She got angry and she threw stones at the monkey. The monkey jumped to the other tree. The girl threw the stone again at the monkey. The monkey fell down from the tree. She walked behind the monkey silently. The monkey heard the noise of her footsteps and ran towards the forest. The girl followed the monkey. She saw the monkey with its group. She was afraid and came back home.

## **New Rooms**

This year Isai Ambalm School strength by 40%. The space we use presently is not sufficient to hold all our classes and we needed to add two new classrooms.

We submitted a proposal to Bajaj CSR through (SAIIR) for supporting building additional 2 rooms. We are happy to share that the proposal has been accepted and MOU signed. We hope to have classrooms

constructed over the next few months on the 1st floor of our main building.

### **Research project on Critical Skills**

We are doing a research project on Critical Skill (goal setting and perfection). The goal is to see how teachers acquire these critical skills of being proactive and planning rather than reactive. It was also to learn from our mistakes and look at perfection. They have understood the concept of Critical Skill and started setting goals based on the learning difficulties of children wherein they are able to apply this skill and achieve the goal. Through this project, they were able to do the activities by following the 'eight steps in the perfection skill'. They are able to make a goal and finish it within the time frame. It helps them to collaborate and communicate with their colleagues and also teachers coming from outside. By doing these research projects, they have touched certain finer areas of insight. They have seen the changes in their students as well as improving their own insight. Having seen the fruitful outcome of the 'critical skill programs' over and over again, it is affecting their own day-to-day life as well.

### **Reading performance by children**

One challenge teachers of 7th and 8th grade face in many subjects is the level of difficulty of English in CBSE textbooks. To address this issue an intense one-month reading activity was planned.

To make them focus on details, a constant evaluation process was introduced. In this they were tested for comprehension, spellings and meanings of words in different

contexts. They formed sentences with these words and were asked to apply them in real life. Later they would be given a reading test in which they read the text with proper intonation and expression. They then wrote a few stories in their own words using new vocabulary they had learned. Finally, we did some grammar exercises at the end of each chapter.

As the system got stabilized, they became more familiar with how to approach a written text. At the end Science and Social books were given to test their readiness. We observed that they felt comfortable with science and social books.

During this one month, we had an annual performance day. We generally perform a dance, drama, etc. But, both the teacher and the children felt that it would distract them from the intense reading month they were having and it was decided that this year they would give a performance of their reading ability. During the performance, there were 50 books brought to the stage and parents from the audience were asked to pick a book randomly and give it to the children who read it on stage. One group of more advanced readers was asked to read articles from the newspaper of that day. Performance went really well and parents could see that their children could read. In this performance we attempted to highlight the outcome that children are able to read comfortably and the children were also happy with their performance.

### **Aurogame sessions by Paula**

Paula Murphy has been coming to Isai Ambalam once a week to work with the KG

children on patterns and games. As teachers of KG we have noticed after attending Paula's class, Sairam has developed an interest to create many designs on his own in his class. He created some designs with wooden blocks and has a good perception and his structures have increased in complexity. He is willing to help others when they are doing the activities in the class-room. He speaks more about Paula's mirror activity (how a pattern looks when you have two mirrors) at home.

From the last month after attending Paula's class Varathan shows increased creativity. He involves himself into many activities including reading. With any material he comes across on the ground like sticks, leaves, pebbles he likes to create some designs.

Before attending Paula's class Loshika didn't involve in any activities enthusiastically. Now she is able to create some designs and shapes by using the pieces of paper in indoor activities.



After attending Paula's class, we have seen Rithika is gradually improving in her memory. She is now able to concentrate from the beginning of the activities. Earlier

she only observed the activities, but now she is involving herself and enjoys all the new activities in Paula's class.

## Magazine

At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> term, my students in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and I planned to prepare a Tamil magazine.

Every Thursday we have a library hour and children enjoy reading stories, puzzles, riddles, G.K etc. After reading a book they enjoy sharing what they read with each other. We tapped into this sharing and took it to the next step of creating a magazine to share with others in the school. We fixed an aim for creating a magazine as 'Learning to read and write creatively'.

The children described the articles, activities which they liked in magazines; then they described what they had missed that should be in a magazine.

While sharing in the group, some students said that they wanted to draw some pictures, and some of them wanted to make puzzles while others write stories, language games, etc.

To develop these skills among them, I felt they should practice: finding the main idea, developing their vocabulary, form good sentences, how to ask a good questions and write a summary. I felt their talents can develop and express through these and they

can think critically.



I am not certain that they acquired all the skills by preparing one magazine and I plan to continue this activity every term. What I can say that they have stepped forward in reading, writing and life oriented critical skills. Out of the 14 students, 10 students were aware of their learning and could express it. They learned how to solve the problems and improve themselves while working in groups. They tasted the quality of their presentation. Their drawing, writing and creative skills have improved by significantly through this initiative.

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