

IGNITING classroom Transformation



IGNITING classroom
transformation





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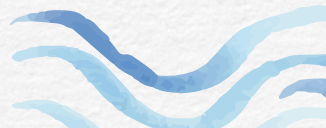


Introduction

Early childhood is a time of great promise and rapid change when the developing brain is most open to the influence of relationships and experiences. Emotional well-being and social competence provide a strong foundation for emerging cognitive abilities, and together they are the bricks and mortar that comprise the foundation of human development. The emotional and physical health, social skills, and cognitive-linguistic capacities that emerge in the early years are all important prerequisites for success in high school and later in the workplace and community. Yet significant disadvantages in the lives of young children can undermine their development, limit their future economic and social mobility, and thus threaten the productivity and sustainability of an entire country. A case in point is the recent global pandemic.

The COVID-19 crisis brought education systems across the world to a halt. This generation of students now risks losing \$17 trillion in lifetime earnings in present value, or about 14 % of today's global GDP, because of pandemic-related school closures, according to a report published in December 2021 by the World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF. Almost two complete academic years have elapsed with little curricular learning in the current class. But this is only one kind of learning loss.

Equally alarming is the widespread phenomenon of 'forgetting' the learning from the previous class. This regression in their curricular learning includes losing foundational abilities such as reading with understanding and performing addition and multiplication, all of which they had gained proficiency in. The absence of these foundational abilities will impact not only the learning of more complex abilities but also conceptual understanding across subjects.



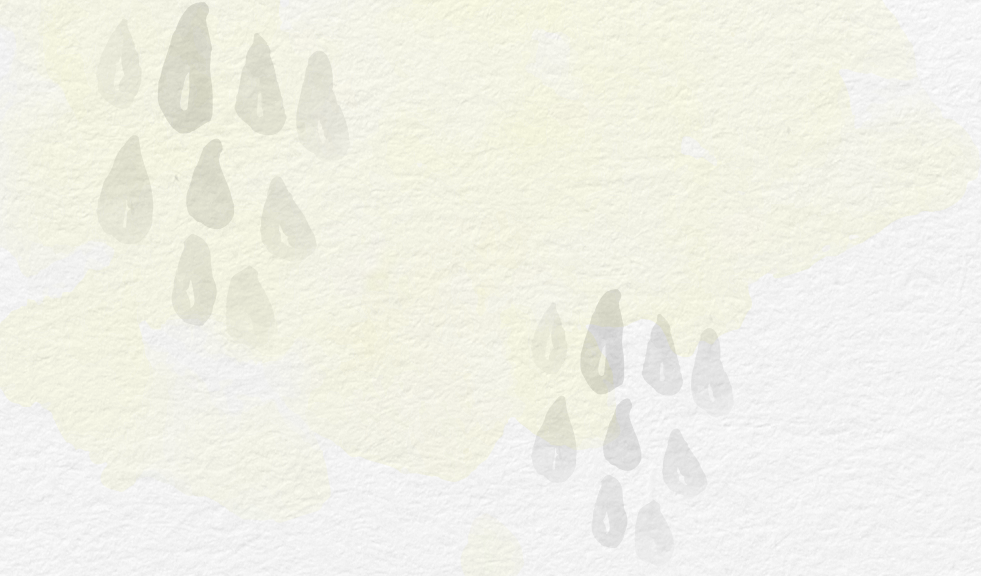


Thus, the overall loss of learning – loss (regression or forgetting) of what children had learnt in the previous class as well as what they did not get an opportunity to learn in the present class – is going to lead to a cumulative loss over the years, impacting not only the academic performance of children in their school years but also their adult lives. Exacerbating the situation, children from low-income households, children with disabilities, and girls were less likely to access remote learning than their peers. This was often due to lack of accessible technologies and the availability of electricity, connectivity, and devices, as well as discrimination and gender norms.

It was in such a unique, volatile and complex scenario that EarlySpark restarted its work in February 2022 with 62 government schoolteachers and 1,200+ students (ages 6-8) in 25 schools. Our mission is to augment student learning outcomes by creating optimal learning environments. We focus on a balanced approach to emotional, social, cognitive, numeracy and language development – taking forward the NIPUN Bharat Mission of the Government of India. Working closely with the schoolteachers, we create positive classroom experiences through workshops and in-class demonstration of best practices and innovative teaching pedagogies over a period of 100 hours. Through simple but meaningful activity-based learning, we ignite problem solving abilities, confidence, self-reliance, and growth in students that can last for a lifetime.

The stories you will read ahead reflect the positive change that EarlySpark has brought in the lives of NaliKali children through government school teachers.

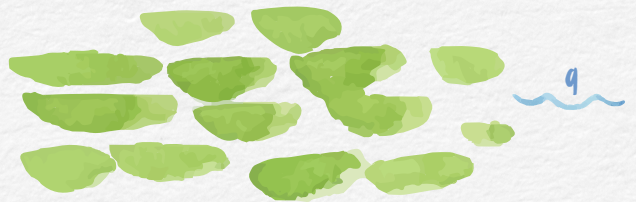
Going forward, we will be working with 280 primary government school teachers and 7,000+ students across Dharwad district in this academic year. Besides, we will be actively looking for viable solutions to reinforce the role of parents and communities in children's development to accelerate recovery from their learning loss.





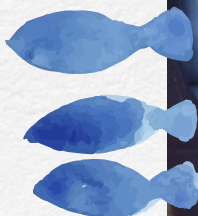
Nali-Kali



students



Kindling the
hidden spark

Swati Jeeragi
Mantur village







If the pandemic was tough on adults, it was brutal on children. Cut off from their schools and prohibited from playing with their neighbourhood friends, it was truly the lonely winter of their lives. Online classes had provided but a weak semblance of school. The scenario was even more stark in rural areas. Images of children sitting on trees and roof-tops to access online classes came in from across the country. Scores could never connect, and the vital learning chord was cut.

Schools reopened in Karnataka after nearly 2 years in February 2022 to mixed responses. While many children were happy to return to their classes, some were reluctant. One such wary child was Swati Jeeragi, a Class 1 student at Government Higher Primary Kannada Girls School at Mantur village. Having grown accustomed to leisurely watching her lessons on WhatsApp, she did not want to return to the rigour of full-time classroom-schooling. Her educated parents tried with all their might to persuade her, but she did not relent. So strong was her resistance that when they threatened to put her into a residential school, the feisty 6-year-old fasted for an entire day.

While the tussle played out in Swati's house, the instructors of EarlySpark had begun their intervention at her school. They shortly learnt of the little girl and her unwilling stance. The instructor went to Swati's house, incidentally, located right next to the school. Using all the tricks of child-motivation, she convinced her to attend school that day. Swati sat for a total of 90 minutes. The instructor took special interest in her, slowly drawing her out of her shell. Within a few days, she was able to complete the subject worksheets and the instructor praised her publicly. The graph below shows how her attendance doubled and tripled. She now sat through the day, enjoying the vibrant picture cards and creative activities, all brought to her with dollops of dedication.

Swati's renewed interest in school was largely a result of the specialized curriculum developed by Early Childhood Education experts at EarlySpark. English language development, social and emotional learning, and Science and Math with Arts integrated in the form of activities, provided holistic development for the child. The pedagogy is designed to allow many opportunities for children to explore their inherent curiosity, critical thinking, and communication skills. Disguised as play and fun, the curriculum delivers important academic lessons, ensuring the child achieves age-appropriate learning goals. Children are thus happy to come to school, while the teachers can maximize their time and efficiency, producing results.

The instructors are pleased that Swati has overcome the pandemic-induced learning lethargy to become one of the brightest students of the class, enthusiastically answering questions and asking many herself. Her parents smile with pride at her rapid academic progress in Math and English reading, watching her diligently do her homework every day. As she neatly puts them away in her bag for tomorrow, they sincerely hope that their sparkle of a girl grows into a shining beacon for all their village.



Special and precious

Nandish Chavadi is a special child; a slow learner to be precise. His thinking skills are developing at a notably slower rate than that of his peers. He will carry on through the exact developmental stages as his peers but at a comparatively slower rate. This learning challenge coupled with the limited economic resources of his parents foretold a bleak future for him.

The Government Model Primary School at Tarihal village where Nandish is enrolled, educates the children of the workforce of Tarihal industrial area, one of the biggest around Hubballi. The school had adequate classrooms and was reasonably well-furnished. It was also sufficiently staffed with friendly teachers. The instructors from EarlySpark were happy to find that children loved coming to their school because of the inviting infrastructure. When the intervention began, they discovered Nandish, a shy child who loved to play but was hesitant to mingle with the others. He was unable to quite comprehend what the instructor was saying and whiled away his time silently watching what everyone else was doing. Seeing his sluggish overall progress, his parents were a worried lot.

Classroom and child behaviour management is one of the keystones of EarlySpark's intensive 100-hour instructor training program. Understanding child development and learning, and addressing challenging behaviour are core modules that the Early Childhood Education experts train instructors in. They learn specific techniques to improve developmental parameters in slow-learning children to the greatest extent possible. All of this was going to be put to test with their new student.

The instructors approached Nandish as they would a small child. They spent time with him individually, playing games he loved, gaining his trust and confidence. They appreciated his smallest achievements, encouraged him to take part in as many activities as he comfortably could, and eventually made him the class leader. Buoyed by his new-found importance, Nandish was a picture of pure joy. He was eager to answer questions and enjoyed interacting with his classmates. Even if the answer was incorrect, the instructor applauded his effort, and this paved the way for his uninhibited participation in any activity.

Nandish was soon able to recognize all the letters, speak coherent sentences and rhythmically recite rhymes. At the end of the intervention, the instructors were sad to leave but deeply satisfied with the results of their tender care over the last 16 weeks. The school's teachers and his parents, having learnt the ropes, committed themselves to further enabling Nandish to become the best version of himself.

India has over two million differently abled children. Majority of them live in rural areas, staving off social stigma and trying to attend the local public school. EarlySpark trains local teachers to not only impart academic skills but also create open inclusive classrooms. Nandish's success was validation that sensitising local teachers can decide the fate of special children, to either soar high or continue tottering on the ground. Because special children are precious. They need to be treasured and nurtured.





Nandish Chavadi

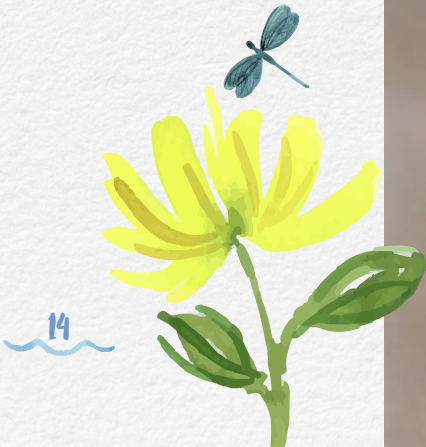
Tarihal Village





Mohammad Zaid Katheeb

Ramalingeshwar Nagar



Creating role models

Children are bundles of boundless energy. They are joyful, fearless, and live every moment, freely expressing the rainbow of their emotions. Mohammad Zaid was different. A class I student at Government Higher Primary School, Ramalingeswar Nagar, he was reserved and uncommunicative, refusing even to make eye contact when spoken to. The simplest classroom activity did not pique his interest. Afraid of crowds and strangers, he had begun to reach a state of panic when he saw his school teacher, perhaps because this was his first year at a formal school.

Zaid's only 'friend' was his older brother who was in class III but studied in the same classroom as Zaid. He clung onto him, as his only source of comfort and security in what Zaid felt to be a hostile environment. To understand his peculiar behaviour, the EarlySpark instructor enquired with his parents. The mother revealed that Zaid had drunk a bottle of paint thinner when he was little. The addictive substance had caused him to suffer a series of mild to moderate health issues, both physical and psychological. He was prone to mood swings and could not concentrate in class, limiting his academic learning. Hence the dependence on his brother for everything.

Zaid's school teacher had tried in her own way to help him, using repetition, but the sheer volume of academic and non-academic work left her with little time to spare. To reach Zaid, the ES instructor decided to take his brother into confidence and made him the 'Hygiene Champion.' Health, hygiene, and safety are integrated into the intervention. Children are taught about nutritious food choices, everyday hygiene habits, body autonomy (to prevent abuse) cardio-pulmonary resuscitation and first aid.

When Zaid saw his brother taking up a leadership position, something in Zaid stirred. He was motivated to emulate him. Pleased with his as-desired response, the ES instructor now made Zaid the leader of a group learning activity, gently prodding him to speak up. The class, then, for the first time, heard his voice, soft yet clear, controlled yet confident. On cue from the instructor, the group followed all of Zaid's commands. Slowly, the fear on his face and in his heart faded away. Now, the learning began. He discovered the thrill of correctly answering his academic worksheets and was elated with his writing, each letter drawn to perfection.

What worked for Zaid was the 'whole child approach' advocated by EarlySpark. The instructor focused on creating a congenial learning environment where children are inspired at multiple levels to be receptive. Having learnt about the influence of her behaviour on the child's mind, she employed patience and positive feedback. She also demonstrated how innovative methods like creating a role model can work wonders, because children naturally imitate people they like.

Zaid's parents were filled with gratitude for the program in general and in particular the instructor. That their child, studying in a remote rural public school could unravel his love for learning, develop leadership qualities, while enjoying every moment of the process, was a game-changer. It was his gateway to a new future.



From trauma to twinkle

A 9-year old's mind is like still water. It runs deep. A lot goes on inside their head than the outside world recognizes. Poverty had forced Laxmi Madar's mother to start work at a faraway garments' factory, causing her to be away from the house for nearly 14 hours every day. Laxmi's father then suddenly left the house, for reasons unknown to her. Feeling deserted by the two most important people in her life, she withdrew into a cocoon. She became silent and uninterested, and the once good-at-studies girl found it difficult to pay attention in class, displaying characteristic signs of childhood trauma.

The EarlySpark instructor noticed Laxmi's silence and her attempts to literally run away from any activity. She had become the butt of many jokes due to her lower than average academic and social skills. Her self-esteem was further affected when she saw children of class I answer questions that she, a class III student could not. The instructor, upon speaking to her schoolteacher, understood the reasons for her behaviour. He then requested Laxmi's mother to spend more quality time with her.

In class, the instructor sat beside Laxmi during the Circle time, when the class would go into huddles to discuss the day's topics. He asked small questions in warm friendly tones, which she surprisingly answered. Her lack of interest however continued with reading and writing. So, the instructor indulged her love for drawing and painting, then staying back after class to help her catch up with the day's reading and writing exercises. He then began giving her one homework task a day, such as learning unfamiliar words in English literacy and doing simple sums in numeracy. Importantly, he entrusted the completion of the task to her mother, cementing their bonding and Laxmi's learning. Soon, she was on par with the rest of her age-group and eagerly participated in every classroom activity.

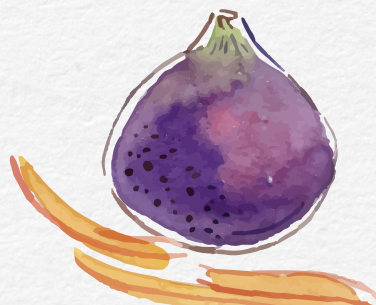
Laxmi's is not an uncommon case. Several children suffer some sort of trauma when their minds are not yet mature enough to comprehend the sudden event or experience. It gets buried in their subconscious, only to manifest as negative personality traits as they grow older. Her teacher at Government Higher Primary School, Bogur could not recognize these symptoms to be a part of a larger syndrome and they were treated as the typical learning difficulties of a normal child. After EarlySpark's intervention, she knew what to do.

Showing empathy and respect regardless of the child's degree of development is ingrained in the training that ES instructors undergo. In unusual cases, they are required to recognize the roots of the child's apparent difficulty and adapt their communication to his/her specific needs, like in Laxmi's case, comfort, and reassurance. Involving family, especially the mother, added a new dimension to her recovery process. She gained the strength to put the trauma behind her and begin on a fresh slate. When the intervention ended, an enduring memory for her instructor was when he first held her notebook high in class, for everyone to see her neat handwriting. When the clapping started, Laxmi's face slowly came alive; her beaming smile and twinkling eyes saying it all.



Laxmi Madar

Bogur village



Rising like a
phoenix



Shriraksha Rao

Belur village





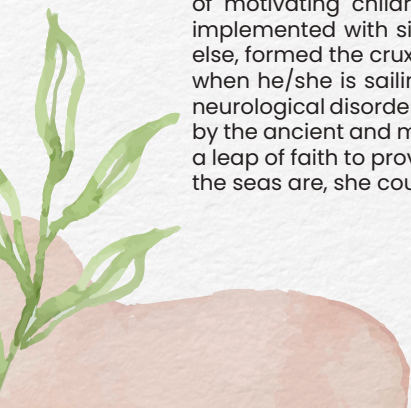
Catalepsy is a neurological condition characterized by a lack of response to external stimuli, muscular rigidity, and fixed posture, making the limbs remain in whatever position they are placed. Occurring in bouts like seizures, it can cause reduced responsiveness and minimal speech even after the episode is over. Shiraksha Rao, a cherubic class II student at Government Higher Primary School, Belur, had catalepsy.

The condition had made the 7-year-old always fearful, afraid when it would strike again, though she was on medication. Silent yet very jittery, she avoided interaction with her classmates. Coupled with her weak social skills was her reluctance to show interest in academics. The girl had refused to read or write even a single word. Both her schoolteacher's and mother's cajoling had gone in vain. When the EarlySpark instructor entered the school, she noticed that the girl needed special attention. Long conversations with her mother and the schoolteacher revealed the extent of the problem.

Being a non-medico, the instructor decided to implement the simple yet powerful methods she had just learnt at EarlySpark's Teacher Learning Lab. She made Shiraksha the leader of the class. Though entirely unforthcoming in the beginning, she gradually began giving directions to the others, even reprimanding them if they did not follow class rules. Having become slightly more comfortable standing in front of everyone, she was asked to write letters on the blackboard. Hesitatingly, she wrote a few, to spontaneous applause from her classmates. The same letters were given for homework, which she did with the help of her mother; both faces lit with delight. Her mother was doubly pleased that her daughter was not only writing but also obeying her commands.

Shiraksha bloomed like a flower. As though by nature's will, she seemed to spread her innocent fragrance everywhere, at school and at home. Her fearfulness reduced and responsiveness improved. Following the clear directions of her kind instructor, she bravely participated in all the activities. The attractive worksheets provided visual stimulation while her thinking and speaking abilities were enhanced by pleasant open-ended questions. In general, she felt in control and even when the episodes came, she was able to come out of it unscathed. At home too, she endeared herself to all, regaling them with stories from school.

During the handholding process by the ES instructor, the schoolteacher learnt the art of motivating children instead of shaming or pressurizing them. Targeted techniques implemented with sincerity, keeping the child's development over and above everything else, formed the crux of the intervention. They provided the steady anchor any child needs when he/she is sailing in rough weather. Shiraksha's rise like a phoenix from her volatile neurological disorder to near normalcy was a not a medical miracle, but one brought about by the ancient and magical virtues of calmness, kindness, and courage. The instructor took a leap of faith to provide an unbreakable lifejacket for the child, that no matter how stormy the seas are, she could still swim to safety.

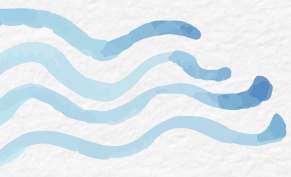






Nali-Kali

Teachers





Smt. Shobha Rudrappa Ujjani

Kusugal village





Teaching made

EASY

Shobha was a brilliant student, securing the first rank in both her 10th and pre-university course examinations for her taluka in Haveri district. What is remarkable is that she achieved both distinctions after she was engaged to be married. Her parents, in their hurry to relieve themselves of their daughter's responsibility, had gotten her betrothed when she was just fourteen. Thankfully, Shobha's fiancé, supported her academic leaning right from the beginning.

Upon completing her M.A. in Kannada and the Teacher Certificate Higher (TCH) course, Shobha joined the DPEP school at Kusugal village in Dharwad district. She had found teaching English to be a challenge because she was neither sufficiently exposed to the language nor were the children. Yet, everyone knew the importance of knowing English in today's world.

When EarlySpark began their intervention in February 2022, the children had returned after a 2-year schooling hiatus. Teachers had to begin from the very basics. Shobha credits EarlySpark with providing the best of teaching material especially the English NaliKali Training Guide; colourful, attractive, and comprehensive books and picture cards that combined both learning the English language and environmental science. The in-class demonstration-based teacher training was structured to gradually shift from ES instructor led to schoolteacher led. Shobha was also able to observe first-hand, how these subjects were to be taught and received constructive feedback when she implemented the same. Children loved the classes. They were having fun, singing songs, reciting rhymes, and enthusiastically participating in the engaging activities.

Shobha feels she now has all the right tools and techniques to enable children achieve excellent learning outcomes. She is now confident to manage various everyday situations like noisy classrooms, misbehaving children and the different learning pace of students while sparking curiosity in them. Professional development is part of the ES goals' set for teachers to bring out the realisation of the influence they wield over children. What a teacher says and does impacts a child's self-identity, behaviour, learning ability and worldview and ES was intent on creating the best of teachers. The greatest beneficiaries are of course the tiny tots who are simply happy to be back in school and how!



Setting children up for all-round success



Sumitra loved learning. Unfortunately, her village school taught only up to class 7. Her determined father strived to allow her to complete her education from the neighbouring villages and taluka. This changed her destiny, as her teacher inspired Sumitra to start teaching herself. She gained her qualifying degree and became a teacher for classes 1 to 3 at the Government Higher Primary School at Bogur village.

Sumitra did not have trouble teaching academics but found it difficult to inculcate good behaviour in her children. This is where she found value in EarlySpark's intervention. The instructor taught the rules systematically and thoroughly, ensuring that each child understands them. They were displayed clearly on the wall, consistently reinforced, and referenced using positive language whenever a child broke them. Children who followed the rules were praised publicly. An interesting incident demonstrates how the rules were beginning to be applied by the children. A child once took a pen from his classmate and claimed it was his. Another child observing this immediately reprimanded the first child, commanding him to "Be honest!" EarlySpark Goal 3 talks about setting children up for success. One of the techniques as part of this goal is to have classroom rules – respecting teachers and classmates, having a safe and calm body, being kind and helpful, being honest and trying your best.

To keep the classroom neat and tidy, the instructor distributed jobs among all the children, entrusting them with responsibility. Wiping the blackboard clean, keeping stationery and supplies in their places, and beautifying walls with their art and craft, were some of the tasks executed every day. These best practices spilled over into their house too, making their parents wonder at the secret of their behavioural change.

Noticing that junk food had made its way into every shop and every house in the village, ES introduced a module on what nutritious food is and why it should be consumed. There was a 'Hygiene Champion' to remind them of daily hygiene habits. This is one of EarlySpark's teacher goals which elucidates simple ways by which teachers can effect behavioural change. Thus, Sumitra learnt how the children were delivered a wholesome mix of academic and personality development lessons, instilling early in them the habits of highly effective people.







Smt. Sumitra Kadlepoanavar

Bogur village

Same yet 
starkly different





Having lost her father at the tender age of seven, Renuka was sent by her mother to study at Raichur, the city nearest to her village, because she did not want her to remain uneducated like her. Her mother's dream was realized when Renuka studied well, became a teacher and taught generations of students from rural areas. Currently she is one of the senior-most teachers at the Government Higher Kannada Girls School at Mantur village.

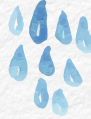
After over 30 years of dedicated service, Renuka was curious to know what was unique about the EarlySpark intervention. At the outset when the instructor was able to persuade an unwilling child to come to school, Renuka was impressed. She was further pleased when she saw the picture cards, flowcharts and innovatively designed worksheets for English literacy, numeracy, and science. She realized that the lessons were the same but the way in which they were designed and delivered was starkly different from the simple textbooks and limited resources the teachers had. The instructor took classes for 2 periods every day during which she kept the children immersed in a series of learning activities. Even writing the English alphabet on 4-line pages was made to appear like a drawing class. Renuka could realise the importance of bringing in innovative and practical techniques to manage her classroom and children's behaviour. She was impressed with the teacher goal set by EarlySpark of adapting instruction and communication to the needs of the child.

During her extensive career Renuka has witnessed the drastic transformation of the minds of students and the world outside. While the cities galloped forward with private schools having state-of-the-art infrastructure and teaching aids, public schools, both in cities and in the rural areas remained in a time warp. She knew her students who came from impoverished backgrounds were more resourceful, resilient, and responsible, but could not contribute to their fullest extent as nation builders. That EarlySpark brought the best of education to remote rural public schools during the crucial formative years of the child, gave Renuka the greatest satisfaction. She knew her children could now dare to dream big and realize them too.

Smt. Renuka Mahesh Kalasapur

Mantur village



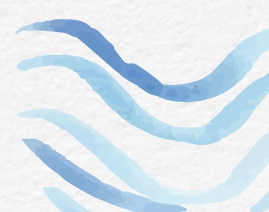


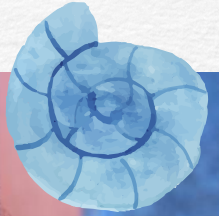
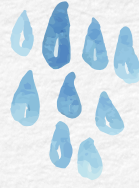
When the classroom invites you

Megha is one of five children and completed her primary schooling at her native village, Thergaon in Uttar Kannada district. Without higher studies options available where she lived, she moved to her uncle's house in Dharwad district where she completed the teacher qualifying course. She vividly remembers walking miles to reach her school after doing many household chores.

Megha joined the Higher Primary School at Yerikoppa village in Dharwad district. Coming from the old school and knowing the hardships of life, she gave her best to the children, teaching not only academics but also instilling living ideals. After three decades in service, she now had the opportunity to explore an alternative method like EarlySpark's intervention. When the ES instructor began classes, she found herself as interested as the children. The weather, personal and social hygiene, colours, shapes, the human body, foundational numeracy, spellings, phonetics, sentence formation and even advanced topics like letter writing was taught to the children in an engrossing way, proactively eliciting responses. The instructor, through every word and action, praise, and laughter, removed invisible barriers, building trust and a warm friendly relationship with the children. When such an optimal inviting learning atmosphere was created and reinforced, it was no wonder that every child eagerly looked forward to coming to school.

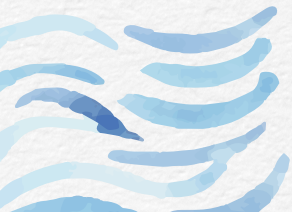
Teachers at public schools do not just teach but are given a host of other responsibilities like helping conduct elections, collecting data for the population census, among regular administrative and documentation work. With their hands so full, there is little scope to either give individual attention to students or try out-of-the-box methods to improve learning outcomes. EarlySpark showed them how they could improve the student's academic and socio-emotional skills within the limited teaching time. Their tools and techniques were provided on a much-needed platter, ready-to-teach, and ready-to-reach every child in the class. And the children lapped it all up.





Smt. Megha Annappa Palkar

Yerikoppa village



“ಮರಳಿ ಅಕ್ಷರ
ಗೂಡಿಗೇ ಪ್ರಗತ”



EarlySpark

 Deshpande
Foundation

TATA HITACHI

Reliable solutions



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