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Short Discussion Paper

Videoshala: An innovation in ICT for elementary education

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VIDEOSHALA

An Innovation in ICT for Elementary Education

PRESENTATION OF THE MODEL, PROCESSES, EXPERIENCES AND TRANSFORMATION

By Deepika Singh and Stalin K.

BACKGROUND:

Access and quality of elementary education is one of the prime issues concerning the nation and an important factor contributing towards empowerment of marginalized communities. *Videoshala* is an endeavor to apply the model of Community Videos for improving quality of elementary education.

Videoshala, as the name suggests is an intervention in ‘shalas’¹ through videos. As more and more domains of our lives are facilitated, and in some cases governed, by technology and as technological innovations are happening at such a fast pace, it is important to ensure that the most marginalized communities get access to technology to better their own lives. For this it is imperative that technology is not just used **for** issues concerning the marginalized communities, but that it be used **by** the communities too.

*Nothing about us
without us
is for us*
– South African slogan

In the specific context of ICT, we believe that the ‘C’ representing Communication and Community, rightfully occupies centre-stage. The ‘I’ is a rather narrow word and we need to expand it beyond Information to include Arts, Culture, Entertainment, History etc. The ‘T’ has been rightly put at the tail end of the phrase, the valid place for ‘Tools’. But we all know of many projects and practitioners who would like to centre-stage the tail, the dangers of which is apparent and does not require a description here. Communication, for us, is the most important aspect in this work because it encompasses the processes, the human aspects of this endeavour. This is where we start seeing the women, men, children and even animals in the otherwise wired and webbed image of ICT. The key questions that all of us engaged in ICT work need to address is : ‘Who controls the technology?’, ‘Who creates the content?’, ‘Who is in charge of the processes?’ *Videoshala* addresses these questions too.

Videoshala aims to :

- Build capacities of community members, often not ‘qualified’, in producing educational videos thereby subverting the hegemony of content creation
- Improve the quality of education by integrating more student-centered instructional strategies which are contextualized to a child’s experiences and realities
- Create instructional content that integrates democratic values of citizenship and caste, gender and religious equality into core subjects
- Develop an innovative, replicable and sustainable model of using community-produced

¹ Shala is a Hindi word which means school.

- educational video as a classroom tool to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- Share content and lessons learned with educational organizations and media NGOs such that they are inspired to use locally-produced video and citizenship education in more creative and effective ways

MODEL:

Videoshala is a project that sets up Education Community Video Units in partnership with local organizations and equips selected community members to produce video-kits on specific themes and subjects for children of specific grades. Drishti – a media, arts and human rights organization, Udaan - a resource center on primary education and Video Volunteers - an organization dedicated to community video, have developed this model and forms the Central Coordination Unit for managing and supporting the implementation of the work. The project is operationalized by four NGOs - Navsarjan, Meghdhanush-Udaan, Sahyog and Hind Swaraj Mandal. Each of these organizations has been working on the issue of education since at least last 5 to 20 years in different geographical areas of Gujarat. Videoshala is supported by Quest Alliance.

At present four Videoshala units are operational at each of the four NGOs and each unit has a well-defined geographic area of operation where each it intervenes in selected government schools, private schools and non-formal learning centers.

a) Composition of a Videoshala team:

Each of the four Videoshala units consist of at least six community persons who are trained in various aspects of video production, pedagogy and content creation. They are referred to as Community Producers. Another set of four to six community members are trained in each unit on the basics of pedagogy, education and facilitation skills so that they can facilitate the video kits with the students. These young people are referred to as Classroom Facilitators.

b) Producing a Video Kit for use in classrooms:

The four Videoshalas have collectively created 8 video kits in last 10 months. In the course of making two sets of interventions in classrooms at the four video units, we are beginning to develop a description of a broad process for intervening in classrooms using videos. This section of the report offers a description of one aspect of this intervention process.²

In order to complete an intervention in a classroom there are what might be defined as three broad phases:

- Research
- Production
- Presentation/Facilitation

In addition to this there is the ongoing process of monitoring the development of the kit and a subsequent activity for evaluating and reviewing the video kits after they have been taken to the schools and presented.

The following describes an idealized version of the steps that are conducted in the production phase. This should not be seen as an exact description of the set of activities that have happened in each of

² We are attempting in describing this process to talk between the two worlds of educating and film making. This writing may seem on occasion to tend toward over definition. This is because both worlds use quite specific terminology and professional practitioners from both are able to read much into words such as 'rough cut' or 'lesson plan' that others may not see.

the video units for the 8 video kits that have been worked on so far. Nevertheless, we do have a sense that there is a signature process that is emerging, which may eventually be described as the Videoshala model. This model is, in some senses, still being refined and in some senses still being discovered. Moreover, within each video unit the process has had various inflections that come from the differing contexts in which the unit is based and to which it is seeking to respond.

Before outlining the production process, it would be helpful to outline some terminology related to the tangible outputs from this phase. Since we have been clear about the need to see a video as a medium to be used to generate learning experiences in the classroom session, we have developed a complete package of items that are used in the classroom. Each package is called a *video kit* and this consists of

- a *video*: this is the film that has been produced by the team of community producers in the video unit.
- an *activity manual*: this is a document that outlines a series of activities that the classroom facilitator would conduct with children during the classroom session.
- a *worksheet*: this is a document which would be duplicated and given to children in the classroom session for them to engage with and fill in during the classroom session.

Activities in the Production of the Video Kit

Research (pre-production work)

- 1) Each unit decides the age group of children/grades for which it wants to produce the education videos.
- 2) Each unit conducts focus group discussions with teachers and students to arrive at ‘hard spots’ – areas that children find difficult or boring to learn and areas that teachers find difficult to teach.
- 3) Each unit then explores the textbooks and reference books to understand the themes/topics to understand the ‘hard spots and lists the various sub-themes under each topic/theme.

For example, if the team has selected theme of human body for children of grade 4 and 5, it would make a list of all the sub-themes such as external body parts, functions of the external body parts, internal organs, digestive system, and respiratory system

Designing the Video Kit

- 4) With an understanding of the theme to be covered, the unit prepares a classroom objective for the video kit, which would outline the specific skills, knowledge and values that the video unit thinks the participating children could develop.
- 5) The team finalizes the sub-themes that it wants to address in the video. The selection of sub-themes is based on producer’s knowledge and understanding about the prerequisite knowledge on the specific theme that children have. In some instances this knowledge is informed by an information gathering exercise with local educational organizations.

For e.g if the producers decide to make video on the various systems of the human body for grade 4 and 5 children they have assumed that the children have understanding about the external body parts and their function. The producers may go to some schools and speak with teachers about these sub-themes the challenges in teaching and learning about them.

- 6) The Videoshala unit researches each of the sub themes and the objective from the textbook by exploring other reference material, inputs from resource persons, visits to organizations,

- and from the local community.
- 7) The Videoshala unit also begins to think about and outline the kinds of activities that could be conducted with the children to help them understand or explore the each of the sub-themes.
 - 8) The Videoshala unit consolidates this work by preparing a document that we have called *Rooprekha*. This document outlines the broad framework of the video and contains
 - a. objective
 - b. the main theme
 - c. the sub theme or themes and
 - d. activities that are planned.
 - 9) The *Rooprekha* is sent to content experts and educational experts within CCU and outside CCU for review. The content experts are asked to help the team understand if the sub-themes and activities are able to fulfill the objective of the video kit and if the objectives of the video kit are well articulated.
 - 10) A *Rooprekha* is finalized and submitted to the Central Coordination Unit for record keeping. [this makes it sound as if CCU only keeps record. It does not reflect the fact that provides critical inputs around content, style, MIS etc]
 - 11) The team attempts to visualize the activities that might be conducted in the classroom, develops an idea for a story that would be shown in the video, and decides upon the format for the video, i.e. fiction, documentary or docudrama.
 - 12) The story idea is further detailed with character sketches drawn up, distribution of dialogues considered, shot descriptions sketched out.
 - 13) The team produces a script. The script itself includes breaks where activities are to be done with children, set of activities and worksheets that are to be given to children.
 - 14) Feedback on the script is arranged from a pool of experts in field of filmmaking, content and pedagogy
 - 15) The feedback is incorporated and the script is finalized.
 - 16) A 'shoot plan' is written, which outlines how the shooting would take place.

Producing the Video Kit

- 17) The community producers shoot the video.
- 18) The activity manual is prepared.
- 19) The 'rough cut' version of the video kit (video, worksheet and activity manual) is presented to team of experts in field of filmmaking and education.
- 20) The final cut of the video kit is prepared, with adjustments according to the review of the rough-cut (feedback that can be feasibly is incorporated into the current video kit whilst other comments are recorded for future consideration.)
- 21) Activity manual is duplicated for distribution.

C) Presenting the Video Kit:

Each Videoshala unit presents the video kit to children of specific grades and a Classroom Facilitator presents this kit. Presentation of video kit is divided into three parts

- Present the video to children
- Pause the video for interactive activities
- Conduct certain interactive activities after the completion of video
- Children fill up activity sheets

The Facilitator conducts the entire classroom session and outdoor activities while the schoolteachers support the facilitators in conducting various activities. The idea is not only to obtain the schoolteachers's support but also to demonstrate the methodology so that they can, in future, take

up this role of Facilitation.

IMPACT:

Till date the eight video kits have been presented in 63 schools (including learning centers) across five districts in Gujarat covering 2,142 children in primary schools and 662 children in secondary schools. While documenting, impact of each video kit is carefully considered on:

α) Knowledge gains of children:

Quantitative analysis of the pretest and activity sheets filled in by children shows a definite increase in knowledge levels of children on the various themes on which video kits were produced and presented. 50% to 93% of the students show better understanding of the subject after seeing the videos. Though the quantitative impact on change in knowledge of children is derived from various tests, the results are not infallible.

Qualitative data brings to lights the difference in knowledge gains of children differing in various schools. The differences have been appropriated to availability of LCD projector, TV, support of school teachers and positioning of video kits during an academic year.

Interesting incidents about children expressing the understanding acquired about a particular theme by asking questions to facilitators are also noticed.

After watching a video on soil one of the students asked if oil and coal are obtained from soil in same form as we use them.

Indeed, most children themselves reported that they would learn faster if they had chance to do practical, action-oriented work like this.

β) Values and behavioral aspects of children:

Children are able to related to the characters of the video, since the characters are children of same region, speak same language and maybe even their friends. Children are able to reflect on own behaviour and experiment with it.

Characters in these videos are from different religion, gender and caste but they are seen in the video,

- Playing together, eating together, going to each others home,
- Asking questions to elders,
- Expressing concern about the incorrect event happening around
- Exercising own rights in simple ways.
- Probing into a subject by interacting with people and natural environment,
- Analyzing and drawing own conclusions
- Having own imagination and sharing it with each other.

Though children are not able to name these behavioral aspects as 'values' of citizenship, democracy and diversity, they, nevertheless, reflect these in their own behavior.

In one school a child, who had participated the video session, asked the teacher if he could clean up his untidy classroom. The child seemed to understand that it was possible for him to take responsibility for the state of his own environment, even though he is not expected to be responsible for it. This story is very interesting because the child was able to go beyond the subject-related material in the video, which was 'Soil', and pick up on the values that were promoted.

material in the video, which was 'Soil', and pick up on the values that were promoted.

During a post-screening activity of a video on 'Various Occupations' at Kumarshala, Vatva, three children were having a discussion amongst themselves about the sweeper's occupation. One of the boys, Kamal, said that they should not call them by names like 'bhangi'. "They are humans like us and it is not respectable to use such words", he said. Another boy, Shoaib, said that they are called so only because they clean and sweep. Deval, the third boy quipped in, "if everyone thought like this then they would be called by disrespectful names for ever. We must not use such words for them." According to the Coordinator at the Videoshala unit NGO Sahyog this story shows that it is possible to work with values based education and that there is scope for more such work in subsequent classroom sessions.

During the shooting of a video at the Videoshala unit at NGO Meghdhanush, an incident occurred that suggested a significant change in the behaviour of children who were participating as 'actors' in the video. During the lunch break on the first day of the shoot the team sat down to have their lunch sharing food with one another. However, two children (one was born in a Hindu family and the other in a Muslim family) said that they would like to have their lunch separately. But as days went on these children started sharing food with each other. They had 'changed' not because of any obvious intervention, but by merely observing community producers all of who together and shared their food. One of these kids later invited all his 'co-actors' and the producers team to his house for dinner and they all ate from one large plate.

χ) Teaching practices:

In most schools the school-teachers cooperate with the classroom facilitators for presentation of the video kit. Many teachers after watching the videos said that teaching-learning processes in their schools should also follow the methods shown in the Videoshala videos, where children not only see and listen but they also engage and participate in creating their own experience and understanding of various subjects.

“The Principal of St. Joseph School in Gomtipur told us that the way in which we conduct our activities, during and after the video screenings, is a good way to ensure a better thinking process in children. Seeing, feeling and touching objects is an interesting, enjoyable and faster way of learning for children.”

Classroom Facilitator, Videoshala, Sahyog, Ahmedabad

δ) Reaching the ‘slow learners’

Most children, forthrightly written off by schools or categorized as ‘slow learners’, find it difficult to participate in day-to-day school work because they are not as skilled in reading or writing. Videoshala employs an audio-visual medium and an activity-oriented classroom facilitation, which by and large does not embark on child’s reading writing capabilities hence children who are not able to read and write are also able to understand most of concepts. However, some of these children face difficulty while working on the activity sheets but the Facilitators and school-teachers make an extra efforts with such students so that they don’t loose out

“In one of my classrooms ten children could not read well but they were clearly interested in the video. When I was conducting the third activity from the kit these ten kids were trying very hard to read the cards. Normally these kids would not have tried so hard but I think they were trying because they were enthused by watching the video and wanted to participate fully. This may seem like a small achievement but given the motivation of our students and teachers in government schools, it is a good example of how little it takes to enthuse children.

Classroom Facilitator, Videoshala, Sahyog, Ahmedabad

ε) Empowering community:

The Videoshala model equips young members of community in various skills in video production as well as in designing and creating educational content. There are 24 Community Video Producers across the four units who are being currently trained by a full time and stationed Video Trainer. These units and producers will be able to continue producing educational videos completely by

themselves by December 2008, making the units independent of outside technologists. The project has also equipped another set of 20 people in aspects of Classroom Facilitation. The fact that these young community members are handling cameras, computers and text books, interacting with government and private schools systems, and making a meaningful contribution to the education of thousands of children in their own community has tremendously boosted their confidence.

THE ROAD AHEAD:

This journey just began in July 2007 and since then it has trained 24 community video producers, 21 classroom facilitators, produced eight video kits, reached out to 2800 students in 63 schools across five districts of Gujarat. This intervention has served as a launch pad for children to inquire further into their own self and their classroom-subjects. For schoolteachers this is an opportunity to reflect on their teaching practices and equips them with teaching-learning material that ensures basic minimum quality of elementary education. It clearly is a beginning in democratizing content creation in education and making elementary education rooted in children's realities. It is merely a beginning in building an inter-phase between community and schools, thereby creating greater community ownership of education. The large scale impact of Videoshala, or any other similar intervention, will be made possible when its principles, methodologies and products are adopted by formal educational systems and integrated as part of its regular teaching pedagogy. However, we believe that these innovations, with its limited reach, are still very relevant. Just because all your dreams cannot be realized does not mean we should only dream the possible.

About the Authors

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Drishti is a leading media, arts and human rights organization based in Gujarat and well known for its political documentaries, community radio and community video work. Drishti was at the forefront of the struggle to democratize India's airwaves and Stalin is the National Convener of the Community Radio Forum. Video Volunteers is based in New York and is an organization dedicated to setting up community video units. Drishti and Video Volunteers works in full partnership and has set 12 community video units in India. In the last 17 years Drishti has produced more than 30 award winning documentaries, worked with more than 75 activist organizations, conducted over 300 training workshops. Stalin is also a well-known public speaker and teaches at leading media institutions in India and the US.

www.drishtimedia.org www.videovolunteers.org

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Udaan is an initiative of Janvikas and works on improving access and quality of primary education. It works as a resource centre for its ten partner organizations across eight districts of Gujarat and strives to introduce values of citizenship, diversity and democracy in education process