

Pudiyador Times

Issue 6, Apr 2011



**Tots, Tykes,
Technology**

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STARSHIP: ISS PUDIYADOR [COMMUNITY CENTER, CHENNAI, INDIA]

"Hailing Inner PACE crew... are you there?"

"Roger! We can hear you loud and clear, Manix!"

"Great! I can hear you and see you!" This is brilliant!"

We can only hear you, no visuals from your end yet"

<< Silence for a couple of minutes... >>

"Sorry folks, technical trouble. The webcam gave up after our test last night, so I'm using my netbook to skype. You should be able to see us now..."

YES!!! Wow, there are a dozen spaced out kids behind you...!"

<< Lots of pointing and waving >>

"It's 5 am in India, people! The rest are on their way, after brushing!"

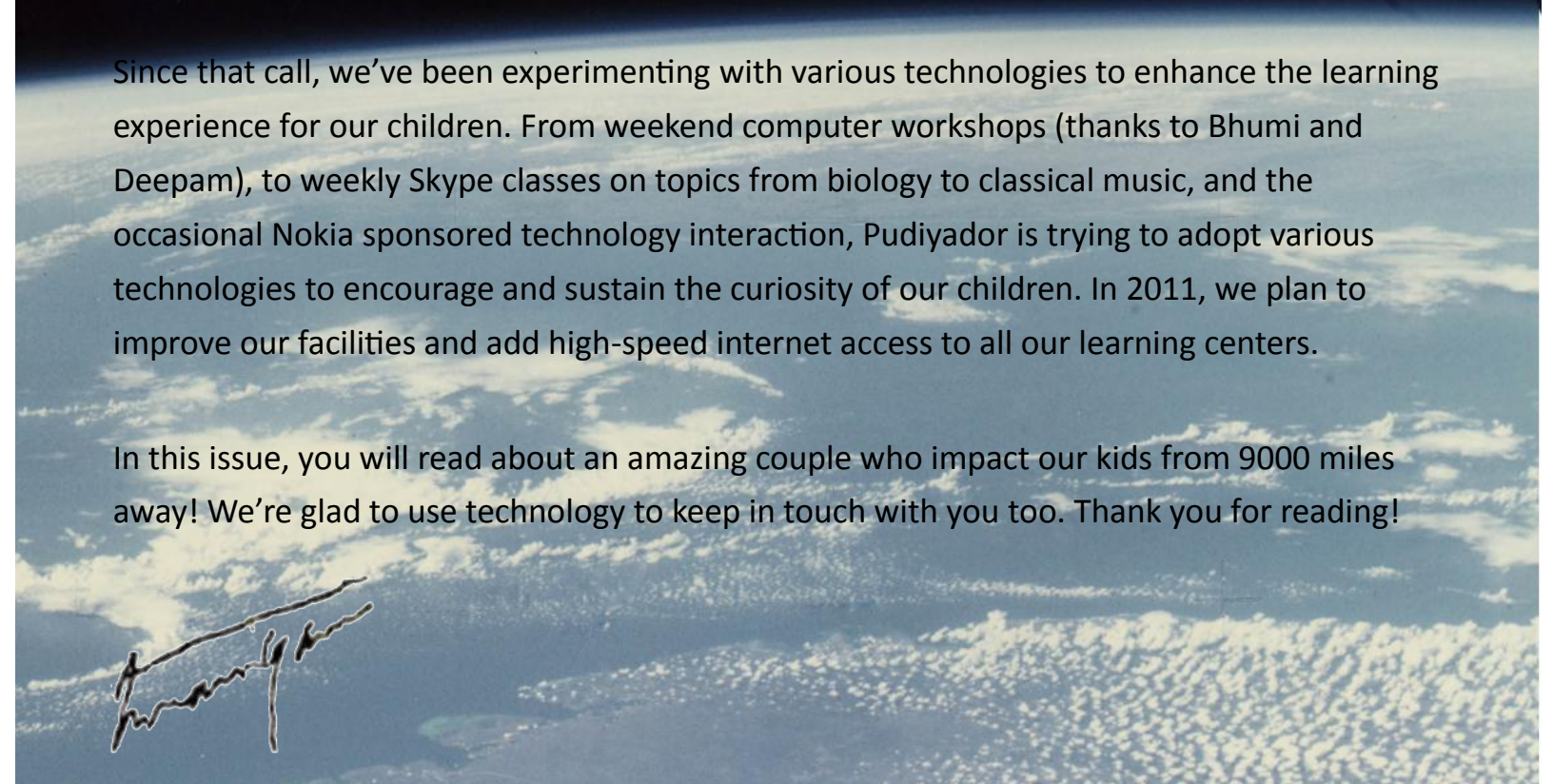
Ok, lets begin with the early risers—we can't wait! Good morning everyone!!

<< A raucous "Yay!" followed by a cacophonous chorus: "Good morninngggg!!!!" >>

That, my friends, was the beginning of the first video conference between our student team in Michigan (innerPACE) and our kids, marking the day when Pudiyaador crossed over the digital divide, *to boldly go where no one has gone before... :-)*

Since that call, we've been experimenting with various technologies to enhance the learning experience for our children. From weekend computer workshops (thanks to Bhumi and Deepam), to weekly Skype classes on topics from biology to classical music, and the occasional Nokia sponsored technology interaction, Pudiyaador is trying to adopt various technologies to encourage and sustain the curiosity of our children. In 2011, we plan to improve our facilities and add high-speed internet access to all our learning centers.

In this issue, you will read about an amazing couple who impact our kids from 9000 miles away! We're glad to use technology to keep in touch with you too. Thank you for reading!



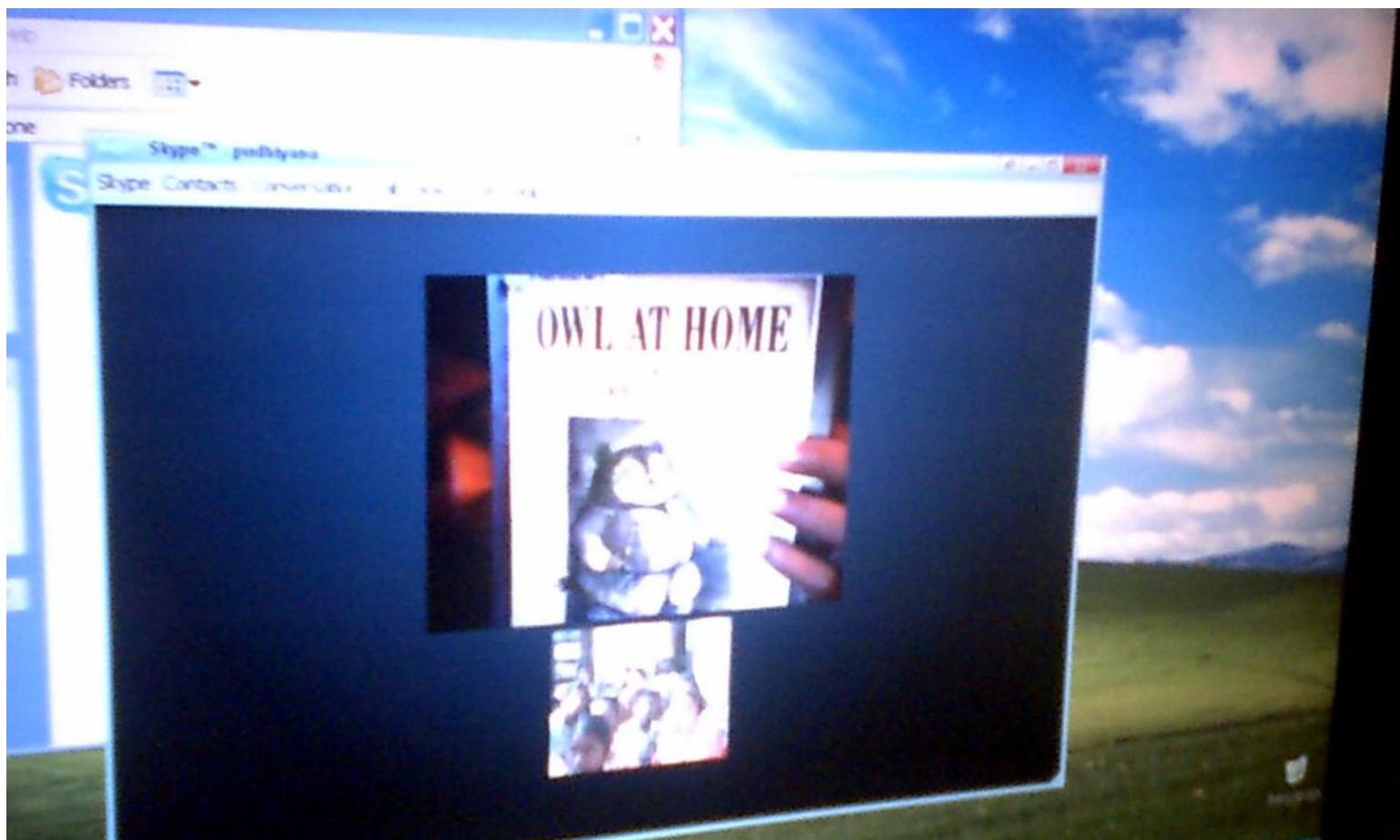
sky is the limit!

With over half of our donors living outside India, we often hear them say "I wish I could do more than just contribute money... I want to be able to interact with the kids". Hema and Dev have shown us how the 9000 mile barrier of oceans and continents can be shrunk using technology. Hema and Dev live in California with their two children, and they conduct weekly classes for our Pudiyaador kids by videoconferencing through Skype. Our children enjoy them so much that they can't wait for the sessions every week.

We spoke to Hema about how she and her family earned their Skyper-star status with our children .

How did you hear about Pudiyaador and how long have you been associated with us?

I heard about Pudiyaador from my nephew Hariharan who is a volunteer with "Bhumi Chennai". He was teaching computer skills to the children at Pudiyaador. The more I heard about Pudiyaador, the more interested I got. During my visit to Chennai in Oct. 2010, I visited the center in Ramapuram and I felt honored to meet Prof. Narayanan. We talked at length about children and education and I was excited that my views matched his! I am a member of a non-profit organization called "Friends of Humanity" (friendsofhumanity.org/). Our group has been focusing on establishing libraries in Tamil Nadu. I found Pudiyaador to be strategically located to benefit from such a resource. So "Friends of Humanity" donated over 100 books, adding to Pudiyaador's existing collection, in Oct. 2010. I have had the pleasure of associating with Pudiyaador since then.



Hema peers out from behind a book she is reading aloud while our kids look on in wonder (window below)

Can you tell us more about the activities that you have been conducting with the children?

Right now, we are in an experimentation phase, establishing a good rapport with the children there. I have no prior experience with teaching. The idea is to enable children to think scientifically, ask questions, look for answers, and solve science/math problems. I believe this will ultimately empower the children. I have an open-ended lesson plan that is guided by the children. I invite questions from them at the end of one session and then answer (some of) them in the next. The questions can be of any nature. I do some reading and browsing and gear up before the next session.

For example, one child asked me (in Tamil, of course), "I have a mother and she has a mother and she has one and so on. So who was the first mother?" I felt exhilarated when I heard this question. This opened up a new arena of scientific discussions; it gave me the opportunity to talk about the "Theory of Evolution". There was once a question about space and so I introduced the "Big Bang Theory".

"I have a mother, she has a mother, and her mother has a mother... so who was the very first mother?"

So the basic idea here is, I try to introduce a concept mostly when it is initiated by the children; they need to be interested in what I have got to say. I also read a story (written in English) to them for 5-7 minutes every session.

My husband, Dev Jain, has been conducting classical music lessons over Skype for the kids. To begin with, he chooses one Raaga, say *Hansdhwani*. He sings the Raaga in its most basic form, one line at a time (no words, just aah's). He has one child repeat that line and then rest of the children repeat after her and so on. This cycle typically continues for the rest of the 30 minutes.



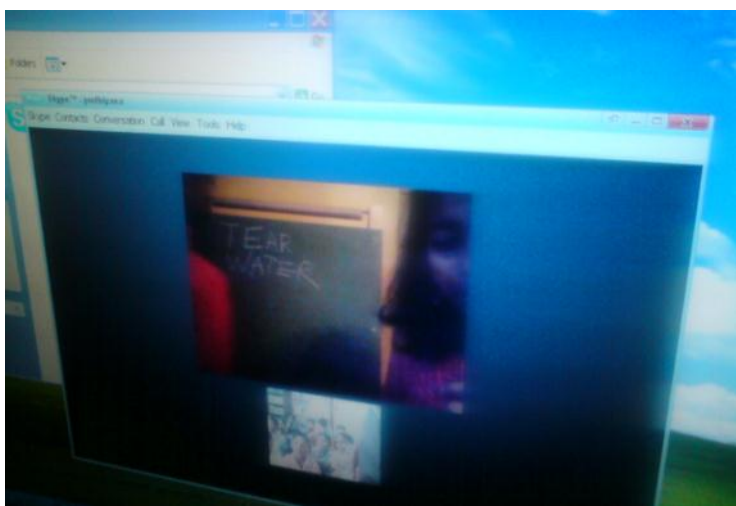
Children glued to their spots while watching Hema perform a simple experiment (see monitor far right)

My son, Abhinav who is 7 1/2 years old, is quite interested in "Origami" (the Japanese craft of folding paper). He has been doing "repeat-after-me" Origami sessions. So far, the children have together made a small box, a Samurai helmet and a cup.

Depending on our schedules, we have been able to do 2 - 4 sessions a week; each session lasting about 45 minutes.

In the past, we have planned and held such sessions with our children through innerPACE (see intro). It is remarkable how similar our approaches are, although you have never met innerPACE. So where did you get the Skype idea from?

I think, basically from simply being with my own children (7 and 5 year olds). Our model of life and learning in our family tends to be multidirectional – we all learn from each other.



Are you able to connect to the kids in Pudiyador through Skype on an individual basis?

I think so. When I answer a child's question from a previous session, it provides her the reassurance that her question was heard and an earnest attempt has been made to answer it. This, and the children's interest in asking question, helps them focus on what we've got to offer. If I can sustain their interest, I am confident our "connection" will be mutually beneficial. There are some children who are shy to speak their minds. I get them involved when we do little demonstrations. Once everyone gets a sense of involvement, it will be a smooth ride. The immense interest the children show is very rewarding and keeps us going.

Tell us about your plans for the upcoming sessions.

I have been documenting the lesson plans on Google Docs. I have shared it with the Pudiyador curriculum team. Since I want to keep this program a "child-directed" one, I don't make a lot of plans. I choose a few topics (for example: Islands, Volcanoes, Gravity, Pythagorus Theorem) and see if they are in line with any of the children's thoughts; and take it from there.

What would be your advice to someone else who might be interested in conducting sessions like this?

Learning has to be made fun. We need to think about ways to make ideas/concepts more tangible and fun. I would be happy to collaborate with others, if needed. This mode of communicating over the Internet has its own downsides:

1. The audio/video quality is not 100% reliable.
2. Children can easily get distracted; what happens there locally takes precedence over what we speak over the Internet from thousands of miles.
3. Children are seated for the most part of the session; it is hard for them. I see them squirming, yawning, stretching all the time.
4. The multi-age group audience makes it challenging for the conductor of these sessions; sometimes what we talk about may not make any sense to some; sometimes it may be too boring for some.
5. It's hard to achieve perfection/precision which is necessary during "Origami" sessions.

These are the issues I have seen. I have solutions only to some of these (example - never extend the sessions more than 45 minutes; if needed, ask the children to get up and do some activity and then get back in front of the camera). I think, just being aware of these problems is good enough. That way the conductor won't get frustrated if the session doesn't go as planned.

Anything else you want to share with our readers

More Pudiyadors, please!! I find Pudiyador children to be distinctly different from most others. I believe that this is a result of all the hours they have spent at this center, getting a wide range of exposure and getting educated in a wholesome manner. We ought to help more and more children in the same way, so "more Pudiyadors please!!"



What happens when you bring 250 little children to one place and let them take over the computers?

Our children participated in “Computer Quest” an annual inter-center computer festival organised by Bhumi (bhumichennai.org). Bhumi is a volunteer-run non-profit which has been collaborating with Pudiyador for the past few years.



At Computer Quest, our little impressionists painted forests and seas using the software *Paint*. They can also teach you a thing or two using the elegant decks they created on *MS PowerPoint* exploring themes such as ‘The Earth’, ‘My School’ and ‘The Computer’.

Finally, they settled down to get their hands dirty with some good old paper and glue and made some thought-provoking collages. What our children loved the most was the chance to interact with around 250 other kids from around the city who had come to participate in the event. Everyone had a great time teaching, learning, sharing and bonding!



This quarter has been fun!



Weekly computer classes combining education and entertainment keeps every child's curiosity piqued...



Have computers replaced dogs to become man's new best friend? Well, looks like our children think so..



That does not mean our kids spend all their time in front of their computers like most of us do! They just need an excuse to break into a song and dance on a bright afternoon!



Drawing with pencils.. drawing with a mouse : A whole new ball game!



Our little *fashionistas* know how to string up beads of different shapes and sizes to make a lovely necklace.

National Service Scheme members from Ethiraj college arranged for our children to meet with the people of Orakkadu village near Tiruvallur. Our kids taught the Orakkadu children inspirational songs and dances. They also enacted a street play on children's rights which moved the village elders to tears. They returned to Madras with lots of new friends and well-wishers.



Little activists at Besant Nagar beach! Our kids joined older activists to protest against the proposed flyover across the beach which will endanger the flora and fauna of the region. They made Origami sea turtles to symbolize the danger the expressway could bring to the endangered Olive Ridley turtles (these beaches are also their nesting grounds).

Protests need not always be gloomy and sad! Our kids sang and played games, celebrating their solidarity in fighting for a cause...

As you were getting acquainted with the various Pudiyador activities and our progress this quarter, have you been wondering what *you* can do to help? If so, you are at the right spot and we are very excited to have you on board. You can get more involved with Pudiyador and our activities in a variety of ways by volunteering your time or by donating money and resources.



If you live in or are visiting the Chennai-area, we would love it if you can volunteer your time with our children. You can help them with their school work, coordinate and/or participate in a field trip or hold one or more sports, art, cultural or individual development sessions. Your interactions can be regular daily, weekly or monthly events (like providing academic

help, teaching them spoken English or taking them on field trips) or you can schedule stand-alone events depending on your availability. Our volunteers typically come up with fantastic ideas to enrich the children's lives through fun and educational activities. You are also more than welcome if you would like to interact with the parents and share your knowledge and/or experiences with them.



If you are unable to make a time commitment and instead you are looking for other avenues to be engaged with Pudiyador's efforts, we welcome your donations. You can make a one-time donation or pledge a fixed amount every month. We are set up on [Paypal](#) and we also accept all other forms of donation - cash, cheque,

cashier's cheque, etc. Pudiyador is a 501(c)(3) organization and all donations made to us are tax-exempt.



One way to easily multiply your monetary contributions to Pudiyador - or any organization that you support - is to contact your HR department to see if your employer sponsors a corporate matching grants program. If your company has such a program, all you would have to do is, fill out the appropriate form and forward it on to us along with your

contribution. We will then send the form back to your HR. This is a simple, yet effective way to augment and even double your donations and we thank you for looking into it.

How can you help?

If you are looking for a list of specific needs that you would like to help with, we are planning to:

Get new/used computers to replace our old ones that are riddled with hardware issues. Please think of us if you are looking to replace your older laptops or have the resources to donate new ones.



Increase our collection of educational kits.

We are looking for new or used educational aids that would foster the imagination of our children—anything from abacus to microscopes, word games to complex science kits.

Extend regular medical services to all our centers.

We need medical professionals to volunteer their time, services and supplies to our children. We can use your help whether you are able to make a regular or single time or resource commitment.

Enable our children to hone their musical abilities.

There is a need for two *Veenas* and two *Sitars* to help with our music classes and for the kids to practice and perform on.

Expand our Audio/Video library.

We are always on the lookout for good audio/video materials for example, National Geographic/Discovery/History Channel features on DVD/Video CD to supplement the children's educational and extra-curricular needs.

If you are able to help out in any of the ways detailed above, please contact our Program Manager, Ms. Saranya Rajendar, at info@pudiyador.org or at +91.99410.59312. The Pudiyador programs are completely driven and sustained by our volunteers and donors. Without your commitment of time, money and other resources, our activities, our goals and even our organization, will be but a dream. We sincerely

We would love your feedback!

Our newsletter team would love to hear from you—after all, you are the reason our team exists! Please let us know what we can do to make this newsletter more informative and enjoyable. Or just drop in a line to say hello :)

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