Sharmishtha Dattagupta
8 Jun 2017

RSV hostel students creativity workshop

designing vermicompost pits using scrap materials

Background

Vermicomposting is a highly effective method for producing compost for organic farming, which is beneficial for the environment as well as the health of the consumer. Moreover, the compost can be sold to generate income. Therefore, learning about vermicomposting can be extremely valuable for RSV children. RSV students have learnt the theory of vermicomposting and have previously watched documentaries about its effectiveness and value. This workshop was designed only to deepen their knowledge about vermicomposting but also engage their creativity in developing designs for vermicompost pits.

Benefits

- RSV students learnt that something valuable like a vermicompost pit can be designed using existing resources and not necessarily require external funding. *This increased their sense of self-reliance and self-confidence and the realisation of the value of existing resources.*

- They learnt how to work in mixed groups and to be creative about designing something using their handcrafting skills and knowledge.

- They applied their theoretical knowledge about vermicomposting and this deepened their understanding about this important subject, which can be a potential source of income for them in the future.

Workshop process

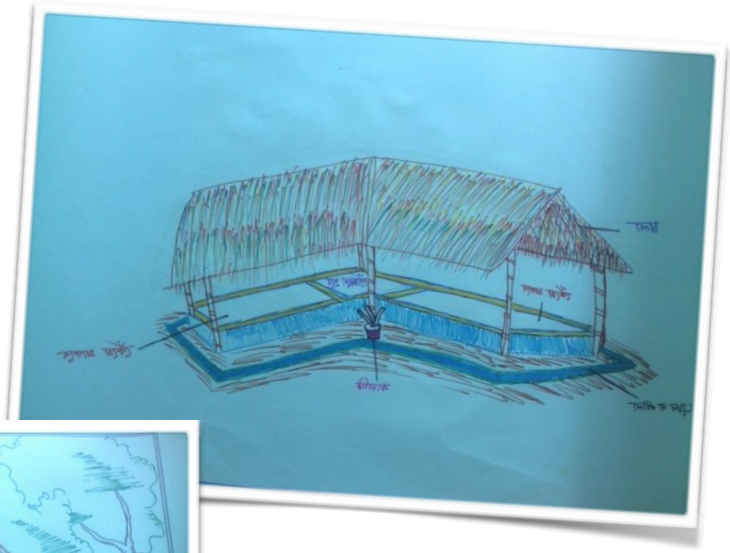
Part one: Collecting ideas

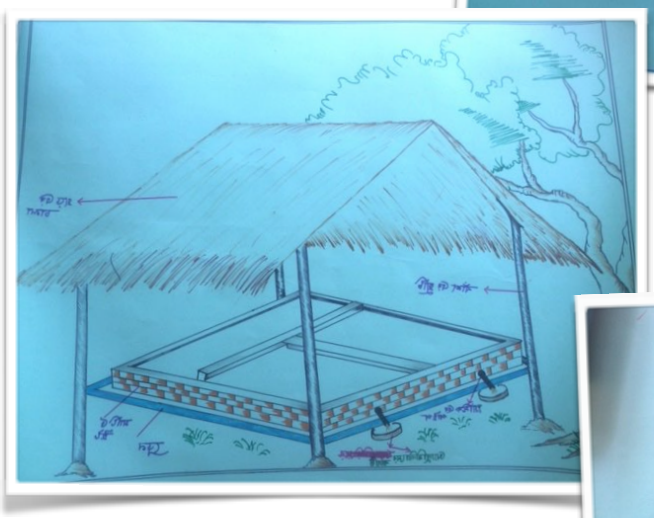
All students gathered together with Sharmishtha (moderator), Pintu Ghosh, Upama Ghosh, and Abhinanda (a biology teacher from another government school near Shantiniketan). Using games and creativity exercises, we collected points from the students about what factors one must take care of while building a vermicompost pit. Students came up with several points such as the need for shade, moisture, regular care, water-proof container at the base, etc. At the end of the session, Pintu-da expanded on the points and explained some factors that the students had not thought of, for example, the need for a water trough around the pit to ward off ants.

Part two: Designing on paper

The students were divided into three groups, each group composed of a mixture of girls and boys, senior and junior students. Each group gave itself a name, where the creativity process began. The names they gave were, “Baha bagan”, “Earthworm”, and “Eight-star”. The groups were then given the task of drawing designs for vermicompost pits on art paper. The students drew three beautiful

designs, paying attention to all the factors they knew (from part one) to be important for the pit construction.





Part three: Building models

The groups then went to work to construct models of their vermicompost designs using natural materials such as bamboo, rice straw, palm leaves, etc. as well as scrap materials like pieces of cast-away wood, bricks, and plastic sheets. They were given 5 days to collect their materials and construct their models. The children

worked with remarkable enthusiasm and worked fully independently, without any guidance or pressure from the teachers. They chose three different locations on the RSV campus to build their models, and built three different designs using materials of their choice.

Group "Earthworm" built an L-shaped structure using bricks and mud for the base, and bamboo scaffolding and straw for the roof. The engineering of their L-shaped roof was especially impressive!

Group "Eight-star", which eventually became "Nine-star" when an additional student joined them, built a beautiful roof with palm leaves and a base using pieces of wood held together with mud and bamboo wedges.

Group "Baha Bagan", built an extremely stable, almost life-size model of the roof, and a base with wooden scraps and plastic sheeting.

Workshop follow-up (pending approval)

Sharmishtha owns a piece of land directly adjacent to the RSV Girl's hostel, which she wants to dedicate to fostering environmentally-sustainable entrepreneurship among the Santal community, led by Santal women. Since vermicompost is a key element of this project, the creativity workshop with the RSV students could be followed up by building a life-size vermicompost pit on this land using existing materials. The best aspects of each design emerging from the workshop will be taken, and one pit will be built to generate vermicompost. This compost could then be used to fertilise a vegetable garden. This entire project will be done by a subset of the RSV hostel children and supervised by Padma Murmu and Pintu Ghosh.

Funding (in the order of 15,000-20,000 Rs.) is needed for this project for the following:

1. Supplemental building materials for vermicompost pit that are not available already
2. Cow dung to be used in the pit and for fertilising the garden plot (initially)
3. Gardening tools and other vegetable garden materials
4. Long water hose to draw water from RSV property

APPENDIX

All workshop-related photos and written materials can be downloaded under this link:
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/6kkiacm0113u6l5/AABZggMXNQQzKFQvVkzUtfEla?dl=0