



ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15





About us

Akshar Foundation is a non-profit organisation that educates underprivileged children. It was established in 2013. The organisation finds deep roots in the belief of radical changes in the education system particularly designed towards inclusive growth, and much needed drastic changes in the education system.

Akshar Foundation's vision is a world where

every child is empowered to find their genius and a rich, rewarding career. A world where every child is granted a world class education, regardless of their parents' class, gender, race, or religion. A world where every child has access to the collective knowledge of humankind through the World Wide Web. A world where every child has freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and the right to joyful learning.



Akshar Forum

Akshar Forum is the primary operation of Akshar Foundation. The school has one class of twelve preschoolers (age 3-4) and another class of ten older children at the kindergarten level (ages 5-8), including some older children who have received no prior schooling before this year.

Rather than focus solely on a rote memorization, rigid curriculum and examination training, Akshar Forum operates with the goal of training children to be self-motivated scholars, capable of self-education. It utilizes a model of education based on experimentation and on-going active research which each student participates in to design learning programmes unique to each student. Education becomes a process of

collaboration between the students and the teachers, balancing the requirements of the curriculum with the personal interests of each student. Students are taught to enjoy the process of learning and to take responsibility for their own education.

This means they gradually become the architects of their own learning, gaining the skills needed to design, plan and execute their own projects and courses of exploration. They are guided by teachers and senior students, who incorporate the requirements of the curriculum into the student's personal plans. Students are allotted a greater or lesser degree of freedom based on their ability to stay abreast of curriculum requirements independently.





In other words, if they lack the discipline to complete their work on their own, then they are compelled to do it in school. A portion of each day is spent on completing the requirements of the curriculum. However, some students will opt to complete those requirements on their own at home, and devote school hours to other pursuits. If they prove that they are abreast of the work and complete their assignments, then they are rewarded with more time to design their own learning plans. Those who are unable to complete their required work have to devote a greater portion of their school day to curriculum requirements.

The philosophy is driven by the ideal of providing students with the tools she or he needs to educate themselves, since they will need to rely on themselves to learn throughout their academic careers and their lives. Traditional education can have the effect of developing learned helplessness in students, as they never learn to take the initiative to pursue their learning interests independently. Students still follow the recommendations of their teachers, but they have a degree of control over their activities. Independent, intrinsically motivated students advance through their academics much faster than dependent learners.

Akshar Forum Principles

Academic Independence

Each student is her or his own best teacher. Teachers motivate students to independently pursue their intellectual curiosity, interests, and passions. The most vital duty of a teacher is to train students in self-instruction: teach them how to teach themselves.



How we implement it:

Students are given one hour of free learning to start every day. Teachers lay out various modeling and construction toys, puzzles, crafts, books, colouring and writing equipment at different stations throughout their classrooms. Students are free to leave the classroom and engage in whatever activities suit their interests. Teachers answer questions, hold discussions and participate in activities with the children.

During this period, students benefit from socializing with peers from various age groups and develop essential interpersonal skills. Fighting, sharing, and taking turns all provide opportunities for teachable moments.

The purpose of free learning time is to develop independent industry and self-reliance. Our teachers provide



encouragement, advice and guidance; all essential to healthy intellectual development.

Students appear to develop greater degrees of self-esteem and confidence, as they take pride in their independent accomplishments and receive praise from teachers. free learning period provides teachers with a good opportunities to interact on a one-on-one basis with children, as the others are engaged in activities.

Free learning time also gives students a window to express private feelings and experiences. Teachers have the time to provide invaluable individual nurture and care that our students from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack. By observing the activities students choose to carry out, teachers can pinpoint each student's unique interests and natural talents. Teachers work to ensure each child's needs are addressed.





Dialectic Methodology

Students become scholars. Students engage in the process of academic discussion and debate, presenting their own arguments and theories. Students become aware of how their own brains function (metacognition), generating hypotheses, evidence, and experiments (scientific method), and effective communication (rhetorical analysis).

How we implement it:

Children of all ages can engage in lively discussions for short durations. Each class session begins with a structured discussion about a certain, age-appropriate topic, related to the learning theme of the week. Every student is invited and encouraged to participate in the discussion.

Akshar Forum students get a chance to

share details of their own life which makes the learning process more personal and relevant to them. This results in greater engagement throughout the remainder of the lesson.

Students argue and debate topics from a young age ranging from favourite heroes and cartoon characters, to various explanations for the things they observe. They learn to defend their positions and concede points to opponents. Children engage in a natural form of the scientific method.

Older children can have more coherent conversations. Eventually, as the students enter adolescence, this can develop into the capacity for organized debates, focus groups, brainstorming sessions, and project planning.

Information Abundance

If you don't know it, look it up. For the first time, the entire breadth of human knowledge is at our fingertips. Students are impelled to explore the Internet reliably for books, articles, and video lessons on virtually any subject.

How we implement it:

To prepare them for an academic career enhanced by modern information technology, Akshar Forum students are introduced to computers, as well as other devices like cameras and tablets, from a young age. They are each taught the basic skills of scrolling, typing and interaction with graphical user interfaces. Teachers also

introduce them to word processing with large, colorful script to engage them. Students quickly learn the fundamentals of cursor manipulation and typing, despite being too young to read English.

Many subjects can be enhanced with a computer to engage their attention. Studies suggest higher retention rate when instruction incorporates multimedia. It is essential to acclimate the students to the use of technology so they can take advantage of valuable online resources as they get older. An increasing number of careers require some degree of computer literacy. Future trends indicate an ever increasing degree of reliance on technology.





Interconnectivity of Knowledge

A bad student is a bored student. An academic lens can be applied to anything a student wants to learn. Attentive students are more productive, more focused, and achieve higher retention rates. Teachers use the students' interests as a starting point for lessons. Use football to teach physics, use music to teach spelling, use theater and role-playing to teach history, and so on.

How we implement it:

Akshar Forum teachers use group games and interactive educational cartoons to reinforce concepts being taught. The students' personal interests are used as a starting point for any learning activity. If students are not engaged, the problem is in the lesson, not the student.

Interactive and learning games—like using play money to play shopkeeper and learn addition and subtraction, or alphabet flash card games—maximize students' engagement lead to favourable learning outcomes while creating positive associations with learning. These activities create greater demand for afterschool learning activities, with students more willing to learn and reluctant to leave school. Students also repeat the learning games on their own time because they enjoy it. Students retain more information and are willing to focus for a longer period of time if they are engaged in what seems like a game.

Any learning can be disguised as a game for the purposes of early education. Educational cartoons are also used to capture the full attention of the students.

Rural children have very little exposure to English language at home. Furthermore, effective language acquisition requires some measure of immersion. Cartoons provide a useful context for lessons they learn in class. Writing assignments are designed to correspond with the lesson taught in the cartoon. Their enjoyment serves to create more positive associations with English language and schooling in general. This will likely encourage them to watch more English cartoons at home, when available. Furthermore, the games and cartoons give students a reason to learn English and provide a justification for the tedious drills and exercises they need to repeat.





Round Table Seminars

Class size matters. Classrooms are structured to facilitate discussion of learning topics, ensuring each student has the chance to express her or his knowledge, work, and theories. This is the format of instruction usually reserved for elite students in honors programs; the same right should be given to all students.

How we implement it:

Akshar Forum maintains class sizes of 6-8 students to create an optimal learning environment for students. In larger classes, students regularly feel excluded from the group and disengage from classroom activities. A small class ensures no one

student is ignored. Students are grouped by ability, maturity level, and their interest in a particular subject, rather than merely grouping students by age, which can be a grossly over-simplified view for grouping batches of children.

This approach also serves to create a more stress free environment for both teachers and students, which in turn leads to more favourable learning outcomes. Smaller classes, even doing the same activity, consistently have higher attentiveness rates and better performance. Students work harder in smaller classrooms, because they can sense they have more of the teacher's attention on their work, and as such, are more accountable.

Students as Teachers

Students who know how to teach, know how to learn. The best measure of a student's mastery of a subject is their ability to teach it. Students are encouraged to teach and gauged on their ability to effectively convey knowledge to peers, teachers, family and community.

How we implement it:

At Akshar Forum, older students are assigned to teach classes of younger students and lead them through classroom activities, under the supervision and guidance of a senior teacher.

Children begin to serve in this role from as young as 6 years, as they learn to emulate the behavior teachers. They act as effective helpers to the teacher, assisting with classroom activities and helping younger students complete their assignments. These junior teachers willingly assume greater responsibilities in classroom and take the initiative in classroom organization and clean up. In other words, students begin to behave more like adults when they are given adult responsibilities. This will be a crucial part of their development as they grow into adolescence and young adulthood.



Financial Information

AKSHAR FOUNDATION

18, Basisthapur Bye lane -3, Beltola Road, Guwahati-781028
Guwahati (Assam)

Balance Sheet as at 31st March, 2015

LIABILITIES	Amount (Rs)	Amount (Rs)	ASSETS	Amount (Rs)	Amount (Rs)
Capital Fund			Fixed Assets		
Opening Balance	70,120.64		Computer & Printer	30400.00	
Add: Net Surplus	38,935.53	1,09,056.17	Furniture	21350.00	51,750.00
			Current Assets		
			Cash at Bank		
			DENA Bank 125211031115	5938.28	
			ICICI Bank 198905000217	49122.89	55,061.17
			Cash in hand		2,245.00
		1,09,056.17			1,09,056.17

For, Akshar Foundation

For, N C Karnany & Co
Chartered Accountants
FRN: 305103E





AKSHAR FOUNDATION

18, Basisthapur Bye lane -3, Beltola Road, Guwahati-781028
Guwahati (Assam)

Income & Expenditure Account for the year ended 31st March, 2015

Expenditure	Amount (Rs)	Amount (Rs)	Income	Amount (Rs)	Amount (Rs)
To, Teacher Salaries		44,300.00	By, Donation and Contributions		1,59,150.00
To, Purchases					
Books & Games	4527.90				
Printing & Stationery	17941.50				
Uniform	9570.00	32,039.40			
To, Flood Relief at Boko		25,000.00			
To, Administration expenses					
Accountants Fees	2000.00				
Printing of Logo	5000.00				
Telephone	523.00				
Bank Charge	1528.36				
Lawyers Fee	900.00				
Depreciation	5605.00				
Travelling	3318.71	18,875.07			
To, Excess of Income over Expenditure		38,935.53			
		1,59,150.00			1,59,150.00

For, Akshar Foundation

For, N C Karnany & Co
Chartered Accountants
FRN: 305103E

AKSHAR FOUNDATION

18, Basisthapur Bye lane -3, Beltola Road, Guwahati-781028
Guwahati (Assam)

Receipts & Payment Account for the year ended 31st March, 2015

RECEIPTS	Amount (Rs)	Amount (Rs)	PAYMENT	Amount (Rs)	Amount (Rs)
To, Opening Balance			By, Teacher Salaries		44,300.00
Cash in Hand	11,899.00		By, Purchases		
Cash at Bank	55,866.64	67,765.64	Books & Games	4527.90	
			Printing & Stationery	17941.50	
To, Donation Received	1,59,150.00		Uniform	9570.00	32,039.40
		1,59,150.00	By, Flood Relief at Boko		25,000.00
			By, Administration expenses		
			Accountants Fees	2000.00	
			Printing of Logo	5000.00	
			Telephone	523.00	
			Bank Charge	1528.36	
			Lawyers Fee	900.00	
			Travelling	3318.71	13,270.07
			By, Purchase of Computer		32,000.00
			By, Purchase of Furniture		23,000.00
			By, Closing Balance		
			Cash in Hand	2245.00	
			Cash at Bank	55061.17	57,306.17
		2,26,915.64			2,26,915.64

For, Akshar Foundation

For, N C Karnany & Co
Chartered Accountants
FRN: 305103E



Team Akshar

Dr. Alaka Sarma

Executive Director

Alaka is an accomplished educator, columnist, activist, social leader, and law maker. She currently serves as the Dean of the School of Social Sciences and Student Welfare at the University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya. Formerly, she was elected to two terms as a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly, representing the district of Nalbari. She completed her doctoral dissertation on the economy of Nagaland at the University of Bombay, and has taught at several colleges in Maharashtra and the North East. She has been involved in people's movements in Bihar and Assam and has been a champion of social causes for decades, serving with many charitable organizations over the years.

Mazin Mukhtar

Associate Director

Mazin is an education reformer with extensive experience as a professional tutor and private teacher. He has worked on implementing education programs for at-risk and neglected youth, both in the United States and India. He completed high school and junior college at age fourteen after attending schools in New York City, Washington, Egypt, Sudan, and South Africa. Subsequently, he has developed a set of educational and mentoring techniques designed to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds attain outstanding academic outcomes and high self-esteem.

Parmita Sarma

Associate Director

Parmita is a humanitarian and social activist with experience leading projects aimed at helping underprivileged children. She completed her master's dissertation on the challenges of educating children in low-income communities at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. When she was barely out of her teens, she was already organizing and managing educational programs for underprivileged children, as well as working in disaster relief and prisoner rehabilitation programs. As the Principal of Akshar Forum, she has led the establishment of the school.

Himanshu Agarwal

Accountant/Legal Adviser

Himanshu is a partner in the accountancy firm, N.C. Karnany & Company. He is a social activist with experience in several charitable causes. He serves as the financial consultant for Akshar Foundation as well as counsel for all legal matters.

Miguel Galaz

Associate Director, Global Strategy

Miguel is a social reformer and political activist, currently working in the private sector in Portugal. He served for several years with the Portuguese American Citizenship Project, a campaign for civil rights centred in Washington, D.C. He holds a master's degree in International Relations from IE Business School in Spain, as well as a degree in Philosophy from the University of Maryland in the United States.



Thank you for your support!

Abhishek Kumar
Alok Sarma
Amit Godiwala
Arpit Desai
Bhaba Kalita
Deepak Khot
Deepamoni Rajkhowa
Hemangini Shah
Himanshu Agarwal
Induben Patel
Kalyani Bhayani
Manoj Kumar Mahato
Mihir Bharali
Mithun M
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Nainee Shah
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Saurabh Desai
Shakti Thakran
Sujat Jain
Sungremthang Nungate
Subhankar
Varsha Parekh

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