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When A Beedi Roller's Child Designs Robotic Programmes

👤 Mala Kumar

📅 March 20, 2015

📍 Bangalore, Education, Inspirational

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They make robots, programme them and work like pros. Meet the new generation of government school kids and learn how they are becoming robotic champions.

The Masterminds' are just back from an unforgettable contest at the national level, the First Lego League Challenge in New Delhi. Earlier in January, they had won the regional round of the robotics challenge. A week before that, 'The Masterminds' and the other team calling themselves 'The Transformers' were preparing for the regional round of the prestigious First Lego League India Challenge in Bengaluru, and the excitement and confidence in the air was palpable. That was when this reporter met the budding robotics champs.

"She's very good at programming, he is excellent at model-making, and I like to do everything," says class 8 student Ramakrishna, talking about the members on his team, The Masterminds. These are not traits that we generally hear mentioned about children studying in a government school in India.

The teams had been preparing for the contest, coming in one hour early to school in the morning, and often staying back two hours after school. But how did this group of government school kids get into robotics?

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group of government school kids get into robotics:



Nearly 120 students of the Seva Bharat Trust Government School in Viveknagar have been part of a robotics programme for over a year now, thanks to an intervention by Bengaluru-based not-for-profit Akshara Foundation, and Lego Foundation, Denmark.

Akshara Foundation had seen the incredible power of Lego blocks in the learning process of children in over 200 balwadis in Bengaluru, 40 anganwadis in remote Malur, in Kolar district, and in over 40 anganwadis in Dharwad.

“All children are gifted equally. Given the same opportunity, every child can flourish,” believes Ashok Kamath, the Chairperson of Akshara Foundation.



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The Masterminds with the master.

And so, the two foundations decided to have a pilot robotics lab in a government school. "We like to come and work here very much," says Amin. Like many of his teammates, he wants to find solutions to problems.

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Last year, The Transformers created a robotic programme that could regulate the switching on and off of a light bulb based on ambient light. This year, for the challenge, their project looked at answering problems in education.



Robotics for all ages.

"These children are extremely bright," says Sridhar P, their mentor. *"They are quick learners, problem solvers and want to do a lot,"* adds the instrumentations engineer from Indian Institute of Science who gave up a lucrative tech job to join Akshara Foundation and teach robotics.

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Can Children Be Agents of Change? Yes, Here are 4 examples!

Ashoka
India

June 16,
2015

The article gives a glimpse in to schools which have changemaking as the core and few great initiatives that children have successfully

He has been noticing the rise in critical thinking, information literacy, communication, teamwork and analytic skills among the students, and is hoping that with more encouragement from the community, more students can be part of this programme.

The Robotics Lab at Seva Bharat Trust Government School has about 20 computers. A weekly schedule ensures that all the students in the programme get a chance to work on programming, model making and problem-solving.



Boys at the lab


Outside the lab, the problems come in different forms for these students. Coming from economically weaker sections of society, these students see their parents working hard in important but low-paying jobs as beedi rollers, drivers, domestic helps, plumbers and electricians. They struggle to commute, and have little or no academic help at home.

undertaken as a result of this new wave of education.



How Volunteers from 50 Countries Transformed 70 Acres of Arid Land into a Lush Forest in Puducherry

 Catherine Gilon

 June 16, 2015

We have seen signs of it everywhere. Our ponds have dried up, native birds and insects have become extinct, parks have made way for IT Parks. Yet we live like there's no tomorrow. Well, this group of nameless volunteers has taken it upon themselves to script a different future for our children. Their amazing tale will show you how nature can work wonders when you choose to work with her.



In school, the students have to manage the regular curriculum, taught in Kannada, Tamil or Telugu. In the lab, unlike their counterparts in elite English-medium schools, they have to start by making sense of key-board commands.

Imagine learning the meanings of Delete, Enter, File, Format and Extract while you learn more sophisticated things like programming!



Girl students have other problems like getting permission to stay back after school. And in spite of these problems, these students have participated and displayed their projects at forums like the Indian Robot Olympiad at Visvesvaraya Industrial and Technological Museum.

They were the only team to participate from a government school in the hi-tech robotics contest last



India's First Sanskrit Animation Film has 30 Animators working on it and Ilaiyaraaja's Music

Shreya Pareek

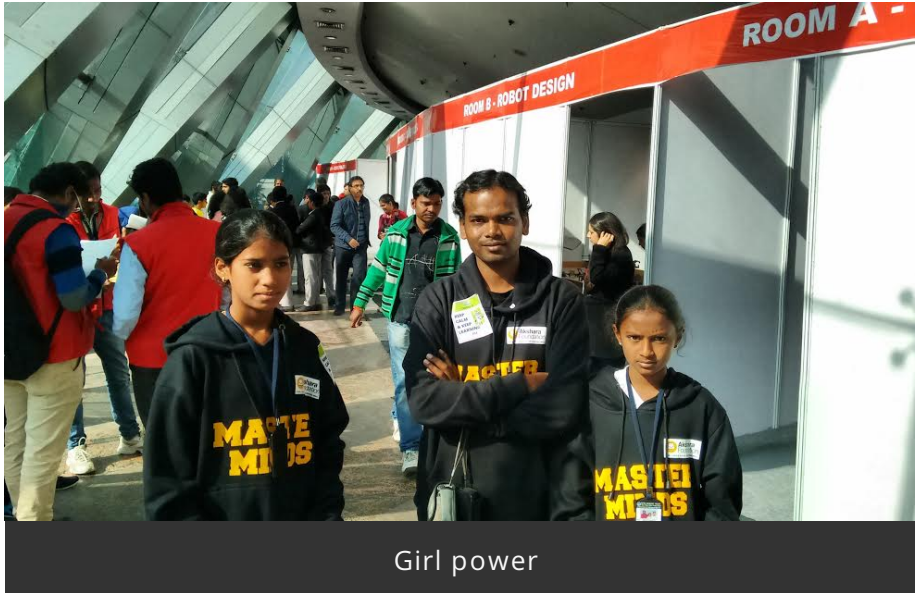
June 16, 2015

Punyakoti, India's first Sanskrit film, will impart crucial life lessons with the help of a holy cow. Veteran music director Ilaiyaraaja will be giving the music score and 30 independent animators are working on the project simultaneously. Here's all you need to know.



Anganwadis across the Country to be Equipped with a Tablet PC for Better Monitoring

year.



Girl power

At the FLL Challenge, The Masterminds presented an idea called 'Need Based Education' and The Transformers emphasized the importance of interactive learning. They made the presentation in English. *"The second part of the Challenge was the Robot game, in which the children had to build robots to do various task in a given time of 2.5 minutes. In the first session, the Transformers stole the show by scoring a straight 255 points, which till then nobody had scored and they stood 3rd in the Robotic Game,"* says Sridhar proudly. The Masterminds stood 4th in the Robotic Game and qualified to participate in the national round in New Delhi.

So why robotics?

"Robotics is exciting, helps children to learn on their own and innovate. It involves learning creatively; and since it involves play, there is no tension in the learning process. If we have to improve education in government schools we have to provide

Surabhi
Katyal

June 16,
2015

Anganwadis will be provided with tablet PCs to ensure better record keeping and swift actions.



10 Incredible Things you must know about NL Beno Zephine, India's First Visually Impaired IFS Officer

Shreya
Pareek

June 15,
2015

100 percent visually impaired since birth, NL Beno Zephine fought against all odds to become India's first IFS officer. Her family read for long hours to help her prepare and she used special software to read from the computer screen.



them this enabling environment," says Ashok Kamath.



Girls at robotics lab.

"Not just that, we have to involve the entire ecosystem in the schooling process – teachers, parents, administrators, public. In ten years time, millions of today's children are going to be looking for jobs. If we don't educate them well in the next ten years, can you imagine the extremely huge number of young men and women looking for jobs but unable to read and write well? It is a problem that is invisible and so people tend to ignore it."



A Chennai-Based Company Designs a Tactile System for the Hearing Impaired to Understand Speech

Surabhi Katyal

June 15, 2015

Sharon Systems, Chennai, has developed a tactile system to enable people with auditory impairment to be able to identify and understand the speech around them with the use of phonetics.



This Haryana Village Sarpanch started the 'Selfie with Daughter' Campaign to Save the Girl Child

Shreya Pareek

June 15, 2015

An interesting contest - "Selfie with daughter" - in Bibipur village of

Akshara Foundation and other organizations like this are looking ahead and trying to find innovative solutions to get children learning well. The Robotics Lab at the Viveknagar school shows what a small intervention can do. It has shown that children can shine well with even small inputs in terms of infrastructure and encouragement. If a small pilot programme, held together by one mentor, can transform the learning process of so many children, and have them shining, imagine the effect if more people join the movement to accelerate learning in schools through innovative and sustained ways!

The Masterminds told me, *“Last year we were stunned just seeing the technology and the preparation of the other teams. We were the only team from a government school. This year we are confident we will win!”*

Haryana is improving the status of the girl child in amazing ways. The contest has received over 500 entries so far and the winners will be given a cash prize along with a trophy and certificate.



Robotics team in Delhi.

By reaching the national level of a sophisticated challenge, they have already won! And just recently, another team from the school, the Dragon Boys, has made it to the nationals of the Robocup Junior Competition!

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contact@thebetterindia.com, or connect with us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter \(@thebetterindia\)](#).

About the author: Mala Kumar is a freelance journalist, author and editor with Pratham Books, a mutli-lingual publisher. She loves to play with words and children. She learnt a lot about money while writing the series of books called 'Rupaiya Paisa', including the fact that investing in every child's education today is a wise way to ensure a healthy society for all in the future.



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Sujata Kini · University of Pittsburgh

Brains and determination cross barriers of economic constraints -- as an educator - I feel immensely proud to see that the tough circumstances have not dimmed the quest for excellence and knowledge ---kids like these make me forget the terrible state of many in our country - for a few hours at least - they keep the flame burning - hats off !

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Rachna Kachru · College of Vocational Studies

Awesome.....simply brilliant

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Alena Jahns · Works at Vikasana - Organisation for education and social development

awesome! I am so impressed ;)

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Nidhi Sharda

Simply brilliant..:)

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Vivek Vivek · IIM Bangalore

Congratulations to these kids, and to Ashok Kamath and Akshara Foundation!

Reply · Like · 21 March at 02:59



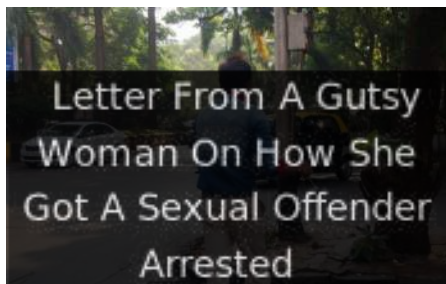
Hari Manian · Sales Executive at Rameswar auto

very impressive , i will guide my kid towards such talents

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