

## **Educating to conserve**

- Education interventions from the Kaigal Education and Environment Program

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The Kaigal Education and Environment Programme (KEEP) began in the early 2000s as an outreach program of The Valley School, where students were documenting the local biodiversity of the region.

Even as we were studying the forests and collecting seeds, the education program began in response to a need from the communities. The tribal communities were knowledge holders, yet there was a recognition from them that their children had to go beyond the experiential learning of their community. Building a culturally responsive curriculum that valued the knowledge and lived experiences, and traditional skills of the communities are the foundational principles of our schools, called the Sanctuary schools. The community elders interact with the children and teachers, sharing their knowledge. Building a team of sensitive, empathetic adults as teachers is another important aspect of these schools.

Recognizing that there is a need for schools and children to have more opportunities to connect with the natural world, we began the environment education program which has as its core intent, building a sense of wonder and respect for nature, as it is. Children from urban schools come to our centre, where they participate in various activities of tending to the land, surveying farming practices, interacting with the Sanctuary schools or working in the farms. These activities provide opportunities for children to learn from different people and naturally allow for building links between communities, building respect and empathy.

We feel that re-imagining educational processes, with hands-on experience with the natural world, is an important aspect of conservation.