

A window to the world through hole in

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Kailash (13) spends his day working at a tea stall near a Delhi government school in an East Delhi slum. The walls of the school enclose a world unknown to him. But thanks to a scheme by the Directorate of Education (DoE) and NIIT, Kailash has a window, literally, to a world of learning earlier denied to him.

Aptly named 'Khulja Sim Sim', the scheme enables underprivileged children to learn through computers. Windows with computers, which open outwards, have been installed in the compound wall of the school. These computers are used by children like Kailash.

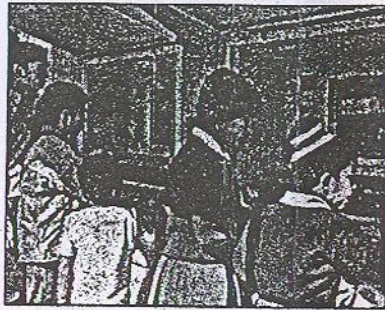
"I play games on the computer," he says. He doesn't know the names of the

looking at 2008

games or the numbers on the screen but his learning doesn't depend on his reading skills. "They learn quickly what icons to click and play games through hit-and-trial," Rajesh Patel, caretaker of one such centre at the Kailash Nagar school, says.

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT)-based learning centre is an offshoot of NIIT's 'Hole in the Wall' programme, started by Sugata Mitra in 1999.

At present, only two such centres are operational in Delhi but 75 are under



construction. "The DoE has given the contract for building these centres and they are expected to be ready by the end of January," V P Singh, state project director of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, says.

The contract for 55 centres has been given to NIIT's Hole in the Wall Education Limited (Hiwel), and the rest will be

developed by IL&FS Education and Technology Services Limited. "The companies are responsible for providing staff for the centres and maintaining them for three years," Singh says.

The computers are fixed at a convenient height with a crystal polymer sheet covering the big monitors, and have a set of touch keys instead of the mouse. The children play simple games based on mathematics and scientific concepts. A section also includes the 'Caltoonz' programme, a DoE initiative to tell stories in cartoon format.

The drawback is that the games, except for Caltoonz, are in English, a language the children don't understand. "I don't know what it says but I know which button to press for music," Kailash says.

This, officials say, will not hinder the scheme. "The fact that the child comes to

the kiosk regularly is a big achievement in itself," Abhishek Gupta of Hiwel says.

Charu Malhotra of IL&FS says the kiosks should be seen as an aid to informal, unscripted learning. "These programmes teach children basic concepts, life skills, hygiene, and even basic mathematics," she says. "It is not feasible to have the kind of teaching modules used inside schools here." Education Secretary Reena Ray says, "This is a pilot project, we may add more kiosks if it works out."

The kiosks are set up after awareness has been generated about them in the area. The facilitator at the kiosk is a local trained to operate and maintain the kiosk. "People send their children, particularly girls, to the kiosk easily if they know the person present there," Suhotra Banerjee, Hiwel relationship manager, says.