

21 Feb 09

We (Sanjeev, Santhosh, Manjula) visited the Chandra Nagar Layout govt school at 9:30 am. Our plan was to have a chat with Padmaja to plan out the activities this year. Padmaja was taking a class which was to get over by 10. There were some preparations going on for the school day on 9<sup>th</sup> March and we sat through three of the dances which were to be presented. All three were based of movie songs. The first was regarding the history of the kingdoms in Karnataka, the second was a romantic and partially patriotic song and the third was the song of a bull festival.

Discussion with Padmaja:

*S: How was the trip with the children?*

P: It went well, we went around Karnataka. We went with 60 children and 10 teachers.

*S: What is the calendar for the school like in the coming months?*

P: March 23-April 11 we have the final examinations. The school re-opens on 28 May for teachers and 30 May for the children. In the holidays we have to take care of election, attend teacher training and have special classes for a few of the selected children (25). The teacher who takes the special class gets to take ½ the time off as casual leave.

In Oct-Nov we have another break for Deshera.

*S: We would like to understand the role different organizations who are working with the school are playing.*

P: Only Shikshana and Asha are supporting us. We have received some one time gifts like from Oracle and the coordinator was working with Minchu so they also gave some gifts to the children.

*S: We would like to understand the assessment scheme of Shikshana at the school.*

P: Shikshana has assessment examination for grade V. This is in June and for Maths and Kannada. There is written and oral examination in one day. The teachers are not around during the examination, it is conducted by the Shikshana people. We are given % for the school. We are in 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the 10 schools they support in this area. We need to stay at the same level or go higher. In math there is transaction, multiplication addition competency that is tested.

*S: What do you think of the evaluations?*

P: They are good incentives, we give more importance to the subjects to be tested in the examination for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. We have model question papers and we train the children for that. We also take extra classes for the children. We also have similar evaluations by the government themselves (KSQUO?) conducts examinations for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

*S: The evaluation is a sort of incentive for the teachers.*

P: Yes

*S: What specifically in the evaluation is the incentive?*

P: They are supporting us so they need to feel that what they are doing is useful.

Usually, individual attention is difficult for the teachers to give to the children, but the 5<sup>th</sup> class does benefit.

*S: How many people conduct this evaluation?*

P: 3.

*S: How do you utilize the feedback from the evaluations? Is there any follow up?*

P: If the feedback comes soon it can perhaps be available to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher.

*S: Is the feedback specific to a child?*

P: No, it's for the school as a whole. Is Asha planning to put in their own examinations?

*S: We are just trying to understand the system of evaluation right now .How about evaluations in the school?*

Each teacher conducts tests after every 2-3 lesson areas. We have 3-4 unit tests each year apart from the main examinations.

*S: What do you feel is the difference?*

P: The only difference is that it is a third party examination. We also have only a small oral part, but this is more rigorous. We do it gradually over the whole year and this is once a year.

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*There is an annual day on 9<sup>th</sup> March. Each grade has some indoor sports and cultural activities. There are 30 first prizes, 30 second prizes, 30 third prizes needed (perhaps in all 100 gifts). The activities are running, frog race, musical chair, lemon and spoon, etc.*

*P: Can asha support the gifts?*

*S: I'll pass on the information to the group and we will discuss and decide.*

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*S: Do the teachers set the papers for their own classes?*

P: Yes.

*S: Can the other teachers set the papers and make it a third party?*

P: This would not work. The units are smaller and it would be too much work for other teachers also they will not know what is covered properly

*S: Fair enough. What specifically in the external evaluation is then an incentive? Is it to be ranked with other schools?*

P: To be frank, it's just the feeling that someone is even interested in what we are doing. In the last year the asha volunteers have visited frequently and this has been wonderful. As far as assessment is concerned when Ram was teaching here we got frequent feedback and we could work on it quickly.

*S: What is the benefit of our visits?*

P: The volunteers have worked on co-curricular areas that we don't get a chance to do. Games like word-building or even the sports is something we are not able to do. We also have seen that gradual changes come in not just our teachers, but also the asha-teachers when volunteers don't come for long durations. Right now the asha teachers are wonderful and are doing as much or more work than most of us.

*S: What do you think of us working on curricular aspects?*

P: To be honest, if the time is limited to only a couple of hrs in the week it is better to focus on co-curricular aspects. There is not much continuity or point in curricular activities.

*S: Do you think evaluating the asha teachers is something we should try to do?*

P: I have also thought of that in the past. But, we get paid a lot more and this is our responsibility, they are only supporting us. To be fair we need to get evaluated first.

*S: What are the asha-supported teacher teaching?*

P: Sekhar is taking care of 4<sup>th</sup> grade – EVS, Kannada, Math and Oral English (names of fruits, veg, etc). For 5<sup>th</sup> grade he takes Kannada.

Mariappa is taking care of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade – Kannada, English and Math.

*S: Does it help having the Asha and Shikshana teachers?*

P: The role of the govt school is very difficult. We have 360 children from the local slums and the number is only going up each year (we expect 50 children to join next year). We have only 6 teachers + principal who is busy with admin. We go up to 8<sup>th</sup> grade now. The only reason the govt pushed for that is the most of the girls were dropping out and being employed as maid servants. But,

this interest in them is also only till they are 14 yrs of age and are considered children. But, very little is provided to make this a real high school. Ideally there should be a teacher who is qualified to teach them, we don't have it so we have to manage, but it is tough. We are supposed to have a PE teacher for a high school, but we have none. Without the 4 additional teachers (two from each org) it would be impossible.

Additionally, there is a lot expected of teachers by the government (though recently this has come down). We used to take surveys every 5-10 months of the neighborhoods to find the statistics of the children. Go door to door and look for children.

We get children from the migrating workers on the streets and take them into the school, but they have never been to school and can't be at their age appropriate grade. We try giving them extra class and attention but all this takes a lot of effort and is not easy.

*S: Do you think it makes sense to consider supporting a sports teacher?*

P: We not have the energy to conduct proper sports/classes for the children. We also do not know any of the rules properly to help them with team games. Generally, the children are asked to go to the field when we are unable to take a class and not a planned effort.

*S: I would like to understand a little more about the teacher trainings that are conducted.*

P: Most of the training is in the summer. It is for different subjects.

*S: Who trains?*

P: Resource people.

*S: What does the training cover?*

P: It helps us understand what we are supposed to teach and it also has aspects on how to teach.

*S: Do you find teaching techniques are often limited to having a smaller class and not applicable in a govt school?*

P: Some things are useful and some things are nice but not achievable. I had attended a training program in math over a weekend. I was teaching math that year and I found it quite useful. Asha had organized it.

*S: What do you select to train in?*

P: You don't. You get allocated something. It is not even related to what you teach each year.

*S: Do you change what you teach each year?*

P: We teach different subjects each year. We meet together as a group and discuss who will teach what. Most subjects and classes are rotated. I don't have a science background so science courses are the toughest for me. If the training is related to what we need to do the next year it serves as a refresher.

*S: I'm sorry for not informing you that we were planning to ask all these questions.*

P: This was different, usually we keep thinking of what we are going to say when we have time to think and answer question. We sugarcoat and perhaps don't say things as they are.

*P: How does asha think of working with the schools?*

S: We want to be honest about the initiative. We have taken some effort to for volunteers to try to visit and contribute in small ways and understand how things work at the school. There are always going to be some things that we like and some that we don't. The hope would be to actively find the areas of overlap and work on them. Some things don't make sense to us, it doesn't mean it is wrong, it just means we don't understand it enough and don't support it. For example, the recent Karnataka trip.

P: Asha has always taken all the children from the school to whatever exposure trip for free. Having worked with asha for the last few years I was expecting it.

*S: Perhaps the next time we plan on our program for the school we could have you or a few teachers come to our meeting and give us inputs on our ideas.*

P: Yes. I have attended one or two meetings a few years back.

*S: Do you think there may be teachers who would look into other aspects of schooling even looking at schooling in a different way, e.g. visiting other schools, even kind of schools.*

P: As long as we are not being judged I think many teachers will be open to exposure. If it could be as free as being an educational picnic most teachers may be interested.

P: It has been great that asha volunteers have been visiting more frequently. I will try to come up with the holiday schedule. I think there are days when we are working and the companies in Bangalore have holidays, perhaps, volunteers who are not able to visit in weekends can drop in then.