

**Conference call with Jeevan Gnanodaya (JG)**

Sep 23, 2009 | 9:30PM central time

---

**Attendees:**

Senthil (Se) (Atlanta),  
Shriya, Charanya (C) (Austin),  
Meera (M) (Seattle),  
Kaushik (K), Shankar (S) (UIUC), and,  
Devarajan (D) from JG.

---

**Minutes** (by K, S):

All: Introductions.

S: What are the main updates from the last 3-4 months?

D: 10th std exam - 14 of 15 children passed, 1 will take exam in parts. ITI exam - all 9 passed, got placements. 2 girls out of this. Have joined work in a local zip factory.

S: In some previous call, you had mentioned that it was not a good idea to put all students in the same workplace? The earlier concern was that if all of them are together, they may just "gang up" and not work at all.

D: Yes, that is right, but this year we did this because many of the ITI graduates were not from Chennai. So parents are not confident about putting them in places other than Chengalpattu, and were even wanting to take them back home if no employment opportunities were found nearby. So D had arranged for work in the neighboring zip factory itself. But the thing is they work different shifts, so things are not so bad. Everything is OK so far.

S: Where do all these working people stay?

D: Currently, they live in the hostel itself along with the other students.

S: Don't they have to try and be by themselves at some point of time?

D: Again, this was mutually imposed by parents and D. The parents' concern as explained earlier + we're just going to try this out for one year. This is like a transition. They're seeing many new things like interacting extensively with outside folks. Hopefully one year will be a good time for them to get used to being by themselves. After a point, the plan is that they will move out and be on their own. But it's not clear yet what the exact plan is going to be.

S: What are the students from previous batches doing now? Are they also staying in the hostel?

D: No, they're employed and live by themselves. Some in the zip factory, some in other places.

S: About school opening, new students, etc.?

D: School opened in June first week (missed the date). 17 (?) new students, 4 could not be retained because of dietary complications - they required non-veg food on a regular basis, but JG serves only veg food. We did not want to make exceptions on this.

S: What about teachers?

D: (gave a break up of exact # of teachers in each category; missed the exact numbers - only remember the 7 trained teachers part)

As for the trained teachers, we have realized that they are only trained in sign language instruction, and can barely handle subjects till standards 4 or 5, max. They're unable to teach subjects beyond that. This is probably because the minimum qualification to get enrolled in their training program is a mere 12th standard or so. Even if they're more qualified, they're not able to teach subjects to students.

Another thing is, starting this year, the government is asking for separate teachers for Maths, Science and Tamil (for higher classes I think), with a minimum qualification of B.Ed. (or a diploma?). So we've been forced to hire a few "untrained" teachers who can handle these subjects for higher classes.

M: (requested clarification on teachers' names in each category)

D: (again, missed this part; think M and D eventually decided to take this matter offline)

M: (identifies some discrepancy in list of teachers given in April, and now)

D: That's because that person got a government job and left. This happens every year, and we've just got to deal with it.

D: Question to all on call - I've been thinking about training some of the best talented students from JG to teach here. Is that a good idea? For example, there is this boy from the ITI who is really good, and we've been experimenting with him for the last few weeks. He currently manages time between zip factory shifts and this teaching duties. He appears to be doing a good job at it. Should we continue to do this?

S: Well, not that we're an authority in this area :) This is perhaps a question better posed to Vicki (V) and Barry (B), and may be even Dr. Vasishta.

D: I've not yet asked any such questions to V and B. May be sometime before they leave, I will.

C: But why exactly are you doing this?

D: Two reasons - 1) This in fact may be a better job as opposed to other opportunities outside. 2) They may be really talented for the job, so no harm tapping that.

Also, we can't randomly train all students for this. Several factors determine whether someone will be good for the job - academic performance, ability to teach, acceptance with students, etc.

Se: What about government requirements?

D: As far as the government is concerned, the qualification is to pass ITI - nothing more.

S: Updates on V and B's visit - How have the first 3 days been?

[Note: Vicki (58) and Barry (~65) are themselves deaf. Vicki is a math professor at Gallaudet university (Washington DC), and Barry is a retired high school teacher. They are at JG to volunteer till October 14th.]

D: Arrived on Monday (21st). There were some troubles initially with food, weather, conversing, etc. But things are slowly falling in line. Will take some more time.

The volunteers are doing ASL which is different from ISL. But I believe they (V, B and the kids) are catching up and coming up to pace. D's son Jeevan is doing most of the conversing in sign language with them. (D himself knows very

little sign language.) The kids are very excited about their presence. V and B spend 2-3 hours with them in the morning, and 2 hours in the evening. The morning agenda is to teach sign language.

S: So what is their POA for the entire stay?

D: They plan to spend weekdays at the school, and weekends traveling. One of the main items in the agenda is interacting with kids in sign language. They were also mentioning some extracurricular activities, but I've not gotten a chance to find out in detail about this. Meetings with teachers and parents are also planned, but nothing has happened yet. It's just two days since they came, so plan to do more next week. And also hopefully, they will inspire students to think big and achieve more.

Also, on 10th October, there is going to be an assembly of about 1000 deaf students as part of JG's annual day celebrations. They will interact with the visitors so that perhaps their reach can be wider.

C/Se/M: Are they going to also teach new teaching techniques to teachers?

D: Plan to talk to them about this, but nothing yet. Currently, teachers observe V and B's interactions with the kids, but are finding it difficult to understand their interactions :)

Se: Perhaps you could take a video of these, so we can understand how things work when they are there.

D: Will try to do it on Monday.

S: So what is your expectation from this visit?

D: Nothing much. Motivating the kids is perhaps the most important thing.

(S will call D after one week to find out more about the volunteers' visit. It's now too early to ask more.)

S: You were mentioning that some government questioned the introduction of sign language.

D: Yeah, there is no sign language teaching in TN(?). Speech is the main focus. This is why such questions arise. But I tell them that we use sign language only to teach English, and do not mix signs and speech based therapy in Tamil.

S: Asha Cornell medical expenses proposal - is it OK for UIUC to tell you by December?

D: Yes, that is fine.

S: There were some plans to introduce 11th standard this year, no?

D: Yes, but this has been put off for this year. Govt. regulations require MA qualified teachers to teach 11th standard, and they ask for 15K a month. And we need two such teachers. This is an expense we cannot afford this year. Mainly because of the upcoming marriage hall opening next year. That takes higher priority.

S: So all 10th standard graduates joined ITI this year?

D: Yes.

Se: How much of Asha funds have been used for the marriage hall?

D: Zero. But this is not possible without Asha's support.

(M and D discuss the details of the marriage hall - where it is located, etc. Most of this can be found in previous calls' minutes.)

K: When do you plan to repay the marriage hall loans by?

D: By 2012.

(A discussion on when second installment of funds from various chapters will go out. Not captured in the minutes.)

Se: Do you draw a salary for yourself from Asha money?

D: No. D covers for his personal expenses from his pension, and rents from some land that he owns. Not too many expenses anyway; simple lifestyle.

[END OF CALL]

---