

VALI SHALA: A SCHOOL RUN BY PARENTS

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Ms Pooja Paija has been working as a teacher since 1988, and has been the principal of Shri Dharampur Primary School for about eight years. When she took over as principal in 2012, the number of students were very less, with most parents sending their wards to a private school. There was no connection between school and society. The parents of children paid no heed to their studies. In fact, teachers would often complain that the parents did not come even when they were specifically called to discuss their wards' performance. Students had to suffer because of this complete disconnect. The parents were unaware of what the students did at school; the teachers, on the other hand, could not ensure they did some lessons or homework, post school hours.

Ms Paija realized that she would have to come up with a constructive solution to the

problem. As a first step, she formed a peer learning group to do remedial work. The group consisted of talented students from Classes 4 and 5 and they were tasked to help their juniors in study for about one hour every day during school hours. Motivated by the success, the principal then extended the activity to the after-school hours. She also arranged a meeting between the parents, SMC members and teachers to be held at the school. She proposed that all villagers should come together to help the students improve their performance. As a first step, she requested the villagers to provide a venue for students to gather for after school hour's studies. Two SMC members responded to the request and allowed the children to gather in their courtyards to study.

In June 2014, she introduced the concept of a 14-day parent school. She divided the students into two groups, one comprising students of classes 1 to 4 and the second with children of classes 5-7. In the evening, after the school hours, the children assembled at the house of a parent for two hours, from 5.30 to 7.30. At first, the nominated monitor of the group conducted their attendance and reported to the host parent. The monitor then followed up with their work (reading and writing, and revision of whatever was learned in school). Parents and other volunteers helped to ensure that the students focused on their work. The children were also taught other things by the host parent, depending on their time availability. These included milking cows, bathing buffaloes, cutting vegetables, cooking, sowing seeds in the farm, embroidering, watering the plants etc. On the 15th day, a "Mahashala" was organized at a public place and this was attended by the principal, CRC, parents, villagers, and as well as alumni. Information was given about the activities done by the students during the 14 days. The next set of two people was selected to conduct



SMC member checking homework at Vali Shala



Use of TLM at Vali Shala (Parent School)



Math activity with students by Parents

the parent school. A 99-member “Pamrat” group was formed on WhatsApp to let the villagers know about the various programs and activities at the school. Any information related to the parent school is uploaded on this group.

Educational progress of children is tested through various competitions conducted in the school. In the beginning, the children were not self-disciplined. Over time, they learned to follow and play by the rules. Ms Pajja was thus able to build a bridge between the school and parents, and in due course, the bond grew stronger, much to the benefit of each stakeholder. So inspired were the villagers that many of those who had sent their wards to private schools now re-admitted them to the private schools. The school achieved Grade “A” in Gunotsav. The Gram Panchayat allotted 3 vigha of land for sports. Inspired by the school activity, a donor provided air travel from Rajkot to Mumbai for all the children. The school had a Facebook page, and impressed by the activities showcased there, a UK-based donor donated a study table and computer. The school was selected in India’s Best 35 Innovative Teachers Festival.

Opinions of teachers, parents, students on the new experiment:

- Teachers: “Constant practice helps to reinforce concepts. Communal learning at the parent school has helped students to improve their performance. This is all the more true for students who were not doing too well in their studies”.
- Parents: “There has been a dramatic shift in the students’ performance. They are more motivated to study. They are more connected to the rest of the village community and are more willing to attend and participate in school activities”.

Even during COVID, the “Parent School” continues to conduct its activities, but while following all recommended precautions.

Ms Pajja’s experiment had been selected as a case study for the online program Samarth conducted by IIM Ahmedabad. She has been honoured for her work by the state government, IIM Ahmedabad, and Open Page (NGO). She has also been featured in the newspaper, Times of India. She received the best teacher award at taluka, district and the state level. Her innovation was selected in 3rd State level innovation Fair for presentation at the Chintan (Contemplation) Camp.



QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. What can be done to motivate parents to enroll their children in government schools?
2. What can be done to ensure that the educational achievement of the children is passed on to their parents?
3. Why is it important for children to be aware of their studies?

QUESTIONS FOR TRAINEES

1. What are the benefits of studying in a group?
2. What changes have taken place in the teaching-learning process due to the parent school?
3. What skills do children develop through peer learning?