

## INCREASING ENROLLMENT IN SCHOOL THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

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Shri Tarunbhai Katbamana was motivated and inspired by his Guru to take up teaching as a profession when he was studying in the 7th grade. This made him chose mainstream Arts rather than Science stream in higher secondary education. While doing his PTC course, Shri Katbamana learnt about teachers, how a teacher should be, qualities of teacher and that he is accountable for the whole society and not just the children. In 1997, Shri Katbamana was hired as a teacher in Nava Bandar Primary School. In 2004, under the Panchamrit program he spread literacy in the village. With the help and co-operation from villagers and his colleagues, the school improved to a large extent.

In 2012, Shri Katbamana appeared for the exam necessary for becoming the principal of any school, the HTAT exam. He then joined the Junagadh City Girls' School number 4 as a principal. He was previously employed in a school as a teacher in the rural area. The problems he faced there were totally different from those he experienced in the urban area such as Junagadh city.



Students learning calligraphy

When he came to this school in Junagadh in 2014, Shri Katbamana was very disappointed with the school's condition and he started doubting his decision to join this school. For the first three months, his mind was very confused regarding the situation of the school.

The first task he took up was to make a list of problems of the school, with the help of students, parents and teachers. It included dog menace on the path to the school, lack of proper seating arrangements for mid-day meals, some trees or plants in the school which were placed incorrectly and inconveniently, water tank right in the middle of the ground, students going to their homes during the recess hours, bad handwriting of children, building construction that led to lack of space, some school materials that lacked organisation, School GR was too long as it was in 11 different parts, irregularity of students, etc.

The list of questions, big and small was then discussed during a staff meeting. This was followed by different meetings. Several suggestions were given in the meetings based on which several solutions were implemented too.

**Handwriting improvement through calligraphy.** Some children had very poor handwriting, especially in home work. Shri Katbamana had frequent discussions with staff friends regarding this issue in an effort to find a way to improve handwriting. He ultimately found a way when he met a painter friend (Pravinchandra Kava). Kava suggested using invisible script (calligraphy) which was taught in initial drawing lessons. This script is used to write symbols just like it is in Gujarati script. It can help learn the curves required to improve student's handwriting. By teaching the basic curves for all the alphabets through this invisible script, which is a very short and simple method, all the students' handwriting

could improve. The writing of semicircle and the vertical line were repeated several times in the notebook for children of class 3 to 4 to initiate a handwriting improvement campaign. Only curves were practiced in the first month, words in the second month, simple sentences in third month, paragraph and transcription in fourth month, followed by evaluation in fifth and sixth months. The experiment yielded good results. Today, this method of using invisible script for handwriting improvement is being used in 36 other schools too. The students felt it was almost magical that their handwriting had become so good. Eventually the children showed keen interest in this campaign and started showing their handwriting to parents as well as neighbourhood. As a result, they were also encouraged and appreciated by the parents. Due to the children's enthusiasm, this method was discussed among other villagers and the news spread in the village by word of mouth without making much efforts. Older siblings of the school's students who were now in high school also improved their handwriting by practicing this method.

**School Store.** Another activity initiated by Shri Katbamana was School Item Store that was managed and maintained by students. Under the guidance of teachers, the children were given protein rich diet, such as peanuts, chickpeas, lentils of daliya for a token amount of Rs 5 which was less than the cost outside. The main purpose of starting this kind of School Store was to ensure that students do not eat packaged snacks and litter the school ground or campus with plastic wrappers. Through this school store, the school ended up earning a profit of Rs 12,000 in the first year. A committee comprising three teachers decided that this money belonged to the students and should be used for them. Steel boxes for snacks were purchased and distributed among all the students of the school. This experiment was noted by media too.

**Medicinal garden.** A Tulsi Van (Basil garden) was created at the school campus. Basil leaves picked from this garden are fed to the students thrice a week during prayer meeting. In addition to this the students were fed fenugreek leaves and spinach too. This reduced the rate of students getting affected with common cold or cough. The parents were made aware that besides education children's health is also a matter of concern. This also increased the trust of the parents in the school and increased their cooperation in school activities.

**The solution to water scarcity.** Although the school had several plants, herbs and trees

in its campus, the problem of water scarcity still persisted. Despite having a proper water connection provided by municipality, there was a scarcity of drinking water at the school. A parent whose child studied in the school, heard about this problem. Being associated with a social organization, he took up this issue with some officials of the organisation. As a result, within seven days this issue was solved and water available through a bore well for the entire school.

**Recognition for students' respect for parents.** A Parents Convention and Annual function was held in the school where awards were given to parents. In addition, students were given awards in about 32 different categories every year. The first, second and third number rank holders of Std. 1 to 8 are given awards. The news about awards being given in different categories during the annual festival was spread in all the areas surrounding the village. People came to know that this school honours the skills of the students. As a result of this kind of initiative, some students from private schools left their schools to join government school.

**Drinking water facility.** The school is frequently visited by members of the Satyam Seva Yuvak Mandal. The administrator of the Mandal, Mansukhbhai came to know during a conversation that it would be highly beneficial if the school's children could drink cold water during summer. The school got a very large water cooler as a gift. Besides this, through the donation, a large water tank with a capacity of 1000 litres was also constructed.

**My English in my pocket.** The students of Std. 6 to 8 had poor reading skills in English. This issue came to light when all the students took the reading test. This issue was discussed with the students and in the parents' meeting too. It was also discussed among the teachers and it was decided to create a guide book for English that contained some limited words. This booklet called "My English in My Pocket" was distributed among all the students. Some words included in the booklet were permanent in their minds now. So, they could easily read English if it appeared on TV. The children also started reading English printed on the packaging of merchandise. Everyone enjoyed learning. As a next step the children were made to read paragraphs. They were also taught the English alphabet so that they could pronounce words correctly. This was followed by the main purpose of this exercise which was to be able to read the textbook. Gradually, this task was also undertaken. In this way more than 90% of the students in the classroom started reading English.

For evaluation too, the children were asked to prepare some paragraphs using the words included in the booklet for evaluation and read them out. Everyone participated in this activity and the result was good. The children also did some homework which included reading English on TV and presenting the details in the school. They could also read English names of items found in the market and their details and presented them in front of everyone.

**Science exhibition for parents.** It was observed that students showed less interest in science and found it difficult to understand some concepts. Moreover, they had hardly heard of several scientific terms. To generate an interest in an important subject like science among students and their parents, it was necessary to provide an environment conducive to create a scientific temperament. Among activities planned to make science interesting for everyone, Shri Katbamana thought of arranging a science exhibition for parents. During this exhibition, the students would conduct experiments in the presence of their parents.

The students were made to understand that if their parents attended this exhibition, they would be able to see their children's experiments and even learn more about Science. Moreover, the students would be able to remember every experiment when they could do it by themselves. The school's science lab was opened and made available to all the students. They were given access to all the tools and asked to prepare an experiment to be demonstrated at the exhibition. They were free to choose an experiment given in the textbook or any other experiment that is connected to science and technology in everyday life. The students enthusiastically started working for their experiments with guidance provided by Mathematics and Science teachers. The teachers of the school took keen interest in this new activity and provided students with whatever help they needed. Most of the parents of Std. 6-7-8 students attended this exhibition.

The science demonstration was very fruitful for the parents. Now the parents also take interest in this activity and help their children to bring tools or materials for experiments from home or from the market. Now this activity takes place on a permanent basis and is organized twice in a year.

**3D Theatre.** Some students of Std. 1 to 8 were often irregular in school. The task of bringing them to school regularly was sometimes arduous. Frequent meetings with parents and counselling with students also did not yield results. So, Shri Katbamana came up with an idea of conducting

a new activity to solve this issue. For this purpose, a three-dimensional film theatre was set up. The theatre was built in the school's computer lab at a negligible cost. The existing system in the lab was used to show films. Also, they bought about 20 3D glasses each costing only Rs 18. A grant from the Mathematical Science Society was used to cover these expenses. At this 3D theatre a film show was organised for the children first. Then, a show was also held for the S.M.C. members. Everyone appreciated this activity undertaken by the school. This also resulted in increased attendance of the students. Several students would come to the school under the pretext of watching movies. The films were often related to topics in the curriculum, so the interest could be maintained and an environment for good teaching was created among the children.

**Increase in admissions to the school.** Every year the school conducts a survey of children below the age of 5 years. As a result of the survey, conducted in the surrounding areas, they found many reasons for parents not sending their children to government school. It was found that the parents were not aware of all the activities conducted by the government school and hence some of them preferred to send their wards to private schools. While others took this decision under peer pressure. Some parents also cited a reason concerning falling of a neem tree during the past in this school which had caused a major accident. A second survey was then conducted by forming a team of 2-3 teachers. This team all went around the area and also held a small parent meeting. In these meetings, Shri Katbamana tried to convince the parents that Girls School No. 3 had all the facilities that are not possible to get even by paying fees in a private school. He also informed them about all the activities of the government school. The school even sent a special invitation to parents to witness the efficient management of the school. In the meantime, the teachers discussed among themselves regarding details of the survey and decided to go around the village again. In this way, the school actively spread awareness regarding the school and gave all details to the people of the area just before the vacation started.

When the school re-opened after vacations, more people started visiting the school. Some parents went to see classes and teachers informed the parents about all the facilities of the school. There is a hostel situated in close proximity of the school. All children staying in this hostel study in private schools. The principal of this hostel had heard a lot about different features of this

school. Shri Katbamana had two meetings with this principal. Followed by these meetings, a total of 27 students from his hostel enrolled into this school instead of private school. More and more parents too started talking about the school. The newspapers also took note of this and made a short documentary about the school. This documentary was showed on TV too in the form of news. Through the medium of TV, news spread to the several areas around the school. There was intensive communication with parents too.

A list of benefits of studying in a government primary school was prepared and noted down by 225 students of Std. 6-7-8. The next day, these children discussed these benefits with their family and others in the neighbourhood. Thus, through word of mouth, awareness regarding this government school was spread in 675 houses.

In 2013-14, 75 children studying in private schools enrolled into this school.

The school then conducted a meeting of all the parents who had switched from private schools to government school. They too agreed to reach out to more and more people. SMC members also accepted this responsibility willingly.

### Honours and Rewards

Shri Katbamana has been honoured as an Innovative Teacher at district level and state level Innovation Fairs for his work. His innovative ways of teaching have been considered as a case study in online training for HTAT, and the training for teachers of IIM Ahmedabad, Samarth 1 and 2. He has been honoured for this innovation by IIM Ahmedabad in Sarth 1 and 2.



#### QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. What activities can be organized to improve handwriting of children?
2. What can be done to increase the regularity of children in school?
3. Why is it necessary to have the necessary educational facilities available in the school?

#### QUESTIONS FOR TRAINEES

1. Why is the participation of parents in school programs necessary?
2. What are the benefits of forming an SMC?
3. What other activities can children do in a computer lab?