

A Determined Teacher

By | Aug 29, 2014

The Rajasthan Council of Elementary Education and Azim Premji Foundation initiated a program to 'identify good educational practices' in Rajasthan. For her determination and initiative, Laksmi Sevadiyan was chosen in the 'School Management and Leadership' category...

I am a teacher. But since I'm a woman, I have the responsibility of my family too. I have to run my house in an organized way, and care for and nurture my children. My co-workers used to wonder, "Will she be able to successfully take on the responsibility of both school and family? All her attention will be on her family. How will she attend meetings and trainings? Being a woman, she'll find it difficult to come to school alone early and leave late, so how will she manage the entire school?" But what I have achieved is here for you to see...



School and Campus

Our school, Girls Higher Primary School, is in Nandiya village, which is about 30 km from the District Headquarters, and 15 km from the Block Headquarters. On one side of the school is an ancient Jain temple, with a pond near it and on another, there is a hill. The two remaining sides have high, brick boundary walls. The setting of the school is so attractive that visitors are spellbound by it.

The school has a total of 11 rooms and 1 hall. These rooms include the office room, computer room, store room, and the kitchen. There is a tube well and a tap that provide drinking water. The school has electricity, and there are fans in every room. Bhamashah Sri Ramesh Prajapat has donated a tank to store drinking water. There are toilets for the girls. Special toilets for the physically challenged students have been built under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan. The campus is green, and is full of bushes and trees like neem, banyan, peepul, ashok, shisham, and bougainvillea. There are slides and swings for the children. There is a large playground in the school, where the girls play kho-kho and badminton. The school has two cycles, three computers, and 12 sewing machines. There are dhurries for the girls to sit on. The school has ample physical amenities too. Among the teachers, there are five men and two women. At present, 247 girls are registered as students.

The difficulties I faced:

- The school's standard of learning was not very high. Students couldn't read and write difficult words in Hindi. Most of the girls couldn't read sentences. They weren't very interested in English.
- The school premises weren't clean. Even the girls did not care about their own appearance or cleanliness.
- When we tried to educate the girls about the importance of studies and hygiene, it had no effect upon them in the beginning. If we stressed too much upon it, they would bring their guardians, especially their mothers, to school.
- During lunch, the girls used to sit in groups, segregating themselves on the basis of caste.

The efforts and the results:

My colleague Ragini Yadav and I had a number of discussions about these issues and how we could go about tackling each one. We then roped the other teachers in and began with taking these small steps:

- Children have a special affection towards their class teachers. It was decided that every class teacher would encourage the students of his/her class every day to be neat and clean.

- During assembly, we started talking about the importance of cleanliness. We would bring students who were dressed neatly to the front of the assembly, and make a special mention of their efforts.
- Once the girls became aware of personal hygiene, we started encouraging them to keep the classroom and the school premises clean.
- In the beginning, Ragini Yadav and I cleaned the school. After visitors started appreciating the appearance of the school, the other teachers and the students also started showing interest in improving the appearance of the school.
- We made a rule that every Thursday was "clean the school" day. To inculcate in the girls a sense of ownership towards the school, we told them that the school was a part of their family, and they have a right over it. The girls started throwing garbage in a pit dug for this purpose, and so the school automatically remained clean.
- We started keeping animals like dogs and cows away from the school premises. The girls were instructed to close the school gate after they entered or exited the premises, by which animals were successfully kept out.
- The girls were encouraged to speak in Hindi, along with the local language. Only by pronouncing a word properly will they be able to write it correctly and only through practice and use will they become comfortable with the language.
- The importance of speaking in Hindi along with the local language was discussed with the other teachers as well. Those who would speak mostly in the local language were encouraged to use Hindi as well, in the classroom.

The students were afraid of English. They considered English, mathematics and science difficult subjects. So they did not show any interest in these. To help the students tackle their fears, the teachers discussed and implemented these points:

- The students should not be told that these are difficult subjects, which they need to put in a lot of effort for and that if they didn't study, they would fail in these subjects.
- The teachers who taught these subjects were asked to start by first teaching those chapters or matters that were interesting. They were also asked to think of different ways to make the other topics engaging. When they did this, the students started understanding what was taught to them, and gradually, they started getting a little interested too.
- The students were taught the spellings of small English words, which they then started using in everyday conversation like, school, dog, student, window, etc. In the beginning the girls were shy; they felt people would laugh at them if they used English words. But when we also started using them, their confidence increased and they began enjoying using English words in day-to-day communication.

Cooperation of guardians, community, authorities and friends

Whenever we laid more stress or emphasis on the girl's studies or cleanliness, they would bring their guardians to school. The guardians would side with, and speak on behalf of the girls. We would have to make them understand that education was for the benefit of the girl, for her future life, and for future generations too. We would tell them that two households would be benefited if one girl is educated. It was only then that the guardians also started supporting our work.

Whenever we ran into the guardians on the way to and back from school, we would make it a point to talk to them about their daughter's level of learning and her cleanliness, so that the guardians would also take an interest in their daughter's studies, and allow her more time to study and learn. Once they understood the importance of encouraging their daughters to learn, they ensured that their girls attended school regularly.

From time to time, I would seek guidance from the Block Education Officer, the Deputy Sarpanch Shri Sanklaram, SDMC member Shri Rajesh Khandelwal and Shri Shival ji and my colleague Ragini Yadav about the work related with school and how to enhance the educational environment of the school. I attended the monthly nodal meetings implemented the guidelines received there. The meeting of the headmasters of nodal schools started being arranged twice a month in a local school. SDMC meetings also started being held regularly. Computers were installed, and all correspondence was through computers. The library was improved. Books were hung on strings in the classroom, from which small children could pick books that interested them, and then hang them back after use.

Some momentous changes that came about due to these efforts:

- The most important change was in the behaviour of the girls. Previously, they would hesitate to go forward and speak, but now they would come up themselves and say Namaste and "Good morning."
- Because of the friendly interaction between the teachers and the students, the students' confidence increased. Now they share all kinds of problems with us in the classroom. Except on Thursdays, all girls come to school in the uniform, their hair in two plaits tied with ribbons, and their *dupattas* pinned neatly.
- Most of the girl members of Child Parliament do the work under their own supervision. During lunch, the girls sit on *dhurries*, chant the *shlokas*, and then eat.
- Under the "Hariyalo Rajasthan" programme, a tree-planting event was carried out, in which groups of students were each given a sapling. The group was responsible for naming, protecting and watering the sapling. The number of trees in the school, which was previously 60, now increased to 110.

Some noteworthy achievements:

- In the *Protsahan* Award Science Exhibition, a student of Class 8, Kinjal Khandelwal won the second place in the Block level, and First place in the District level.
- Before my arrival, the class 8 board exam results were 44.11%. It became 87 per cent in 2008-2009, and 75 per cent in 2009-2010.
- "Satarambh Vakpeeth" was successfully organized in August 2009, and the participation of the girls and SDMC members in the event was noteworthy.
- The *Lahar* Room in the school was the first of its kind in the Block, and I have personally painted on the walls in these rooms.
- In the "Svacchata Varsh" announced by the Unicef in 2008-09, the school got the second place in the Block.

Rajasthan Council of Elementary Education and Azim Premji Foundation jointly launched a program called 'identifying good educational practices' in Rajasthan in 2009 to encourage teachers who are serious about their academic work. About 50 teachers of Sirohi and Tonk district were identified in 2009 and 2010 under this program. A structured process was followed for this.

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