

# Site Visit Report: Balavidhyalaya Center, Chennai

By Ganesh Murthy, Asha Minnesota Volunteer

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October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019; 10:00-11:00 AM

## Site Location

Balavidyalaya School for Young Deaf Children and Institute for Teacher Training, Shastri Nagar, Chennai

## Summary

**Type of visit:** No prior heads up

**Staff count:** 14 teachers, plus 5 administrative

**Number of children at center:** about 68 (Fewer as compared to previous years, but is attributed to more of Balavidhyala's centers opening up in districts)

**Overall impression:** Very good. Visits to Balavidhyalaya have been almost at yearly frequency for me, and I have found them each time to be very detail-oriented and organized. Although I arrived without prior notice, the staff and leadership immediately acknowledged the Asha MN partnership, and found time to provide me a tour. Besides time with the children during their classroom sessions, I was also able to see all 3 of the center's leadership – Director Saraswathi, Principal Dr. Valli, and Vice Principal Dr. Meera – and talk about plans for the year ahead. We talked about their Golden Jubilee celebrations coming up in December (dates have moved from mid-year to December now), as well as Mrs. Saraswathi's ongoing work with the Tamil Nadu government to tackle prevention and treatment for hearing impairment in children in rural areas. Overall, happy with the progress the center and management are making.

## Details

After initial introductions, Dr. Meera took me around to see the Early Intervention (infants <3 years) classrooms, where classes were almost wrapping up.



*Early intervention classes. Children engaged in reading and pronunciation practice*

The teacher to student ratio is about 1:2-4. Since Diwali was just over, the teacher was asking each of the children how they celebrated Diwali. The children were reading sentences they wrote as part of homework, on how the celebrations went, as well as making up sentences on the fly to further questions. The conversation was kept jovial, with bouts of laughs at times – like when one of the kids, when asked how much money he paid for the fireworks, said “I paid one money” 😊

The Early Intervention classes wrapped up around 10.30, and we took a break till the Pre-schooler classes settled in.



*Pre-school groups (ages 3-5) working on daily lessons*

The children in this group had spent at least a year or two in the program, and were more advanced in their ability to read and speak in English. They all seemed very comfortable with their hearing devices, and able to respond to questions that were specifically asked in low whisper.



*Working on writing skills, and samples of homework*

I was also shown samples of homework that the children worked on each day at home with their parents. The homework comprised of sentences describing actual tasks they performed at home with their parents.

After the classroom tours, I spent time with the Mrs. Saraswathi and Dr. Meera reg. plans for the year.

Balavidhyalaya is working at feverish pace to build momentum for their Golden Jubilee celebrations in December. They are having publicity events every month, in order to bring awareness to the causes, prevention, and treatment of hearing impairment in infants. This event was initially planned for mid-year, but had since moved to accommodate various dignitaries' schedules. They also extended a warm welcome to Asha Minnesota team, if anyone was in town in December.



*L-R: Me, Dr. Meera (Vice Principal), Mrs. Saraswathi (Founder & Director), Dr. Valli (Principal)*

Besides the Golden Jubilee, Mrs. Saraswathi also talked about ongoing work with the Tamil Nadu state government to reach into impoverished districts in the state to provide them early education on hearing impairment. This could turn out to be a BIG project if approved, Mrs. Saraswathi said.

## Conclusion

The visit went very well, and we are happy with how Balavidhyalaya is progressing. The Golden Jubilee celebration is also one of the items we provided some funding towards. We will try to have presence there if a team member happens to visit Chennai in December, and then continue to stay in touch with center leadership for next year's plans.

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