

Site visit report: Balavidyalaya, August 22nd 2013 9:30 AM-11:30 AM
By Ganesh Murthy

Location

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

Hosts

Honorary Director: Mrs. Saraswathi Narayanaswamy
Honorary Vice Principal: Dr. Meera Suresh

Meeting Summary

This was a pre-arranged meeting since Mrs. Saraswathi proposed a time that could span both the Early Intervention session (9:00 AM-10:15 AM for children 0-3 years old) and the Pre-School session (10:30 AM-3:00 PM for 3-5 year olds).

Vice Principal Dr. Meera hosted most of the meeting and walk-throughs. Director Mrs. Saraswathi joined us for the last 1/2 hour of the meeting after wrapping up other engagements.

The visit went very much as planned because I was able to spend a good bit of time with the hosts discussing topics of interest to Asha, as well as seeing the children in their natural environment, working enthusiastically with teachers on speech and learning tasks. The facility was neat, spacious and well-organized. The staff was very patient in working with the children and there was good 2-way rapport. The children looked enthusiastic and well taken care of. Overall, I felt that my expectations going into the site visit were well met, at the end of the visit.

Meeting Detail

- *9:30 AM-10:00 AM - Early Intervention session for children 0-3 years old*

After a quick introduction, Dr. Meera walked me through a number of classrooms where Early Intervention sessions were already in progress.

Each of the classrooms had one teacher and 4 children sitting around a desk, working together on listening, reading and speech tasks. The children were wearing hearing aids, which I understand had been tuned for their specific requirements. The teachers were working patiently to help the children listen and repeat words based on pictures. The children and teacher all seemed to share good rapport and many of the children even greeted with a "Hi" when we entered the classroom.

I was informed that there were 42 children in the early intervention program at that time and we must have visited at least 10 such classrooms.



- *10:00 AM-10:45 AM - Break out for discussion*

During the time the early intervention sessions were wrapping up and pre-school sessions were starting, Dr. Meera spent some time with me answering my questions about the school, its history, motivating factors and plans for the future.

Dr. Meera explained how children got enrolled into the program. Usually, parents were referred to the school by audiologists or via other circles, when hearing problems were first noticed in their child. The school then screened the children to determine the level of impairment and prescribed suitable hearing devices. The key to success, Dr. Meera stressed, was early detection - before the children's abilities for coping with the hearing loss became well-established. She explained that even with the most severe hearing impairment, there was always some level of residual hearing capability. With early intervention, the children, with the use of the hearing aids, were taught to tap into this residual hearing and build their hearing and speech capabilities using it. The entire learning program of the school (early intervention plus pre-school) was comprised of proven 12-step curriculum and upon completion of all the steps, the children would be ready to deal with regular school and life.





- *10:45 AM-11:15 AM Pre-School session for 3-5 year olds*

After a short break for discussions, we went back to the same classrooms, which were now occupied by pre-school children and their teachers.

The arrangements for this age-group were very similar to the previous one, with the same 1-to-4 teacher-student ratio. The children were working on much more advanced reading, writing, hearing and speech assignments (including language and numbers). I saw examples of the children's writing and coloring work. Speech skills were much more developed in this age-group and Dr. Meera explained that that was possible because of the Early Intervention sessions that these children had gone through.

I was informed that there were 46 children in the pre-school program at that time.



- *11:15 AM-11:30 AM - Wrap-up*

During the wrap-up, Director Mrs. Saraswathi also joined us. She talked about the teacher training program (Diploma for Teaching Young Hearing Impaired - a.k.a. DTYHI) and how

Balavidyalaya was actively involved in setting up new centers for early intervention in districts of Tamil Nadu and all over India.

She also talked about plans for the future - starting more such centers in rural areas and getting the central government of India involved in spreading the word not only about early intervention in hearing impairment but also prevention. She said that one of the most common causes of hearing impairment in children was from the mother having a Rubella (measles) infection during pregnancy - and through education and vaccination, the number of children born with hearing impairment could be greatly reduced.

We ended the meeting with a note of hope about a continued relationship between Asha and Balavidyala in the years to come.