Project Sangamam Kanini – Case Studies

Background

Asha Chennai has been supporting government schools in the Poondi block of Thiruvallur Dist in Tamilnadu for over 10 years. In the last year, with support from Oracle Foundation, Asha has been able to undertake quality improvement at these schools through the use of technology. A primary component of this is empowerment of the teacher Asha has appointed to these schools by providing them a laptop, Internet connection and also training them on how to use these. Further the computer labs in these schools have also been made functional by repairing the computers as well as enabling them to connect to the Internet via a Wifi-3G hotspot provided to the Asha teacher.

The following interviews for the case studies were conducted at Ammambakkam. This is some 20 Kms from the district capital Thiruvallur and is a somewhat interior village. It is a 2 teacher school with about 50 children. The Head-mistress is very motivated and that shows in the way the school is maintained, run and in how the various materials provided by the government are used. The computer lab was non-functional. Only one of the three computers worked and that too intermittently. The HM and the other government teacher knew only a little bit of how to use the computers and were not comfortable with them.

We have been supporting the school from June 2014. Asha teacher Vanitha has been going there since February. She was given a laptop in August. She has been using that for the last 3 months. We have also serviced/repaired all the computers in the school. They are all working now. However recently they laid a ramp in the school and the people who did that work pulled out the Earth cable. Because of that the government computers cannot be used now. The HM is trying to get that fixed as soon as possible.

Talking to the Students

I spent the time with the children after their lunch. The children were very well organized and many of them were playing Chess and about 6 to 8 of them were hovering around the teacher's laptop. They were quite comfortable using the laptop. They showed the designs they can make with Paint and the games they play on the

computer (part of OneStopEnglish). Then I went to a separate room with 5 students to talk to them.

About the Students

Deepak R   Studying 5th Std., Father works at TVS factory (near Sriperumbudur). Wants to be a Policeman.

C. Lokesh   Studying 5th Std., Father runs a local shop. He would like to become the Collector.

S. Sundarkumar   Studying 5th Std., Father works at TVS factory (near Sriperumbudur). Wants to be a Policeman.

D. Kanisha   Studying 5th Std. Father works in a canteen. Wants to be a doctor.

V. Lokeshwari   Studying 4th Std. Father works as a lorry driver at Uthukottai. She is from nearby village of Chellaiamman Kandigai while the rest of them are from the local village of Ammambakkam. Wants to be a Policewoman.

None of the children's families own any of their own land. Their parents are also not involved in agriculture.

Exposure to Computers:

Other than the school none of the children had any exposure to computers. They do not know anyone or any shop in the village with a computer. Some of their friends in the village go to convent schools. They do not know if they have computers in their schools. They hadn't used computers in the school either till this year as the computers in the school mostly didn't work.

Now they are are able to use the desktop computers in the school as well as the laptop with the Asha teacher. Asha teacher has been teaching them how to use the computers. Asha teacher has also been allowing them to use the laptop by themselves. They enjoy that a lot.

All the children has a strong preference for the laptop over the desktop computers since they can move it to where they want and use it more easily.

What do they do on the Computers?

1. Paint – They like that a lot and they showed me different things they have done with this including a house and lots of nice looking designs.

2. OneStopEnglish Games. They play various games which are designed to improve their vocabulary.

3. They have been seeing Maths lessons and solving Maths problems in the computer.

4. They know how to Login to the computer, shutdown and startup the computer.

5. They are able to save their drawings in Paint into a file and open and show it to me.

Talking to R. Vanitha the Asha Teacher

I then talked to R. Vanitha, the Asha teacher. She has been working for Asha from February of this year.

About her family, education and work ...

She grew up in Seethanjeri a little bigger village in the vicinity. She studied in Kothandaraman High School (a Tamil medium aided school) till 10th std. She then went to the Govt. Girls Higher Secondary School at Uthukottai. Her father was a mason cum building contractor. He is no more. He died 5 yrs back and her mother is now working as a flower seller in Seethanjeri.

She got married 10 years back and moved to Goonipalayam another village about 2 Kms to the other side of Ammambakkam. She has 3 children: girls aged 8 ½ (studying in 3rd std) and 4 ½ and a boy aged 1 ½.

Her husband was working as a helper at a local shop and was out of work the last year or so. She and her husband put all their money to get her a DTEd. They spent almost Rs 3 Lakhs towards this. (Side note: This is a common problem all over Tamilnadu. Because of the large number of teacher appointments by government in 2005 to 2010, the number of teacher training colleges grew exponentially and the appointments dropped very low after 2010, and several teacher trained young girls are now there with no hope for a government job).

Without a teacher job and having spent the Lakhs on getting DTEd, their finances were in bad shape. She worked what they refer to as the 100 days work (government's MGNREGA programme). At that time the Asha teacher job came as a boon.

What was her exposure to computers before getting the Asha laptop?

She was part of a self-help group. Through that she got her only exposure to Computers. Government provided 3 months free computer training for selected members of women's self-help groups who had some education. But in this course, she didn't get to use a computer even once!

Like the children in the school she also had never used the computer till she came to the school. Since she had some basic theoretical knowledge, she started using the government computer a bit. Then with the laptop from Asha, she uses that a lot.

She knows some people who got the free government laptop in her village. Government gives free laptops to government school children who finish 12th std. However they were very reluctant to share that with anyone. So she didn't get to use any of that. She used to long to use a computer. Only with the Asha laptop, she can now confidently use one. She is really happy to get the computer and Internet access. She sees it as a great opportunity to learn. She feels as though now nothing can stop her.

How is she using the laptop and computers now?

She feels the computer and the Internet opens up great new possibilities for her. She has been using the computers in a personal capacity to get news, to see a dictionary, to find out about job

openings and government schemes for her husband. For instance when Abdul Kalam died, she learnt more about that from the net.

She doesn't have anyone she knows with Email or on any social media. So there is really no possibility of using that in a personal capacity.

At the School ...

Children really want to learn with the computer. The other government teachers in the school are not comfortable with the computers. So currently only she is teaching the children with the computers.

She has been teaching the children Paint, OneStopEnglish, Computer Chess and some things in MathIsFun.com. She intends to teach the children the office tools as part of Ooo4Kids (Writer, Impress and Calc).

Does she have anything to say to Asha and Oracle?

Currently the training has been ad hoc. It would be good to have a structured training. The school doesn't have a projector or speakers. It will be good if they can get one. It would be good if the Asha computer teachers also come to schools on this side and she can see how they are teaching with the computers.

(Note: These are all good feedback that Asha is working on.)

Without the teacher's job from Asha, she would have been stuck doing the 100 days work. She is immensely thankful for getting this job.

She has read about Oracle being one of the biggest companies next only to Microsoft. Such a company giving a laptop to a person such as herself is so remarkable. It is so useful to her and the children at the school. She thanks them from the bottom of her heart.