Introduction

The new academic year (2017-18) began on June 1. It has now been well over two months since the new students have settled into the school and the existing children have moved to higher classes. This assessment report (a pre-academic year assessment) is an outcome of several rounds of discussions with teachers and students to examine teaching standards, learning levels of students, and to set goals. Besides the school’s internal assessment method, the ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) format was used to assess the levels of students in English, Telugu, and Mathematics.

Goals

The goals of the assessment were as follows:

1. To identify the learning levels and educational needs of students;
2. To specify inputs for increasing the individual learning curves of academically weaker students;
3. To ascertain the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods and materials;
4. To provide suggestions and feedback to improve the overall academic performance;
5. To assess whether suggestions from the previous exercise last year have been incorporated into the running of the school in general and teaching methods in particular.

Methodology

1. Each student was asked to fill a worksheet (specific to their learning setting) covering concepts taught in each course over the previous two months. Students were also given the option of providing oral responses in order to add to what they had written in the worksheets. This was done keeping in mind that children may not be able fully express themselves in formal writing. The comments of teachers on the learning levels of students were also taken into consideration.
2. With regard to English reading skills, additional time was provided to read out words, paragraphs and stories which were not contained in their textbooks. This allowed for the testing of learning levels beyond their syllabus. This method of testing was utilized in the oral feedback sessions on other subjects as well.
3. As Prakruthi Badi follows the APSCERT Syllabus for grades 3 to 5, the learning levels of students in terms of the syllabus covered was tested. This provided information on where students stand in their learning curves, teaching levels, as well as areas for improvement.

Areas of Assessment

- The two broad areas of assessment were academics and extracurricular activities
- Academics: Telugu, English, Mathematics, Social Sciences (EVS 1), Science (EVS 2), and Hindi
- Extracurricular activities: gardening, poultry, arts and crafts, sports, traditional dance forms (Kolattam and Chakkabajana), folk songs

\(^1\) Andhra Pradesh State Council for Educational Research and Training
Analysis and Observations

• There is a significant gap in the learning levels of newly joined and existing students, particularly in terms of reaching and writing skills in English and Telugu. While most of the new students are able to answer questions orally, several of them are in the early stages of learning Telugu and English alphabets. Some of the existing students are also struggling with language learning.
  ▪ The slow learners from each class are as follows:
    - Class 1: Ramcharan
    - Class 2: Rangappa, Naveen, Sudarshan
    - Class 3: Teja, Hemanth, Vanisri, Pavithra
    - Class 4: Omprakash, Surendra, Govardhan, Akshaya, Archana (only English)
    - Class 5: Anitha, Jyothi, Lavanya, Kavyasri, Anjali

• The teachers are following the syllabus. However, it necessary that whatever is taught as part of the syllabus is covered comprehensively, especially for the 5th standard students, who will have to get ready to leave the school in a less than a year’s time and join mainstream school. It is also important to go beyond the syllabus to ensure a more deep and holistic understanding of subjects. In this regard, it was noticed that many students were blindly answering questions, most of the time correctly, without being able to explain their answer beyond a textbook understanding. This indicates a lack of deeper learning.
  ▪ It was found that the levels of present teachers in English was not up to the mark. This can have negative impacts for children in the longer run on account of wrong pronunciations and not fully grasping the language. In addition, all the children are in need of consistent efforts to improve their phonetics in English in order for them to be able to read properly.
  ▪ A couple of students had regressed from the previous years. It is strongly suggested that the teachers discuss this matter to help them overcome their issues. The students who need attention are Suri (class 5) and Akhilvardhan (class 4).
  ▪ Swapna (class 5) has made a remarkable improvement in her overall academic performance, especially in English. She is a good example of what can be achieved with practice and determination.

• The students are doing well in extracurricular activities. The suggestions from the previous assessment seem to have been taken into consideration. Apart from the activities that were done in the previous year, poultry has been added as a new activity. At the moment, Sashi is in the charge of the gardening work with children in an informal capacity. It is suggested that her role be formalized to ensure that the children’s learning potential in this activity is achieved.
  ▪ It was noted that separate worksheets were not being used for children with learning disabilities. This creates an ineffective assessment mechanism since the sheets are either blank or scribbled. This is a matter of concern which needs to be addressed immediately.

Suggestions

1. Extra classes and additional time has to be provided for new students and slow learners in order to enable them to catch up. Additional worksheets have to designed for children who are still getting acquainted with Telugu and English. The worksheets should be outside the parameters of the syllabus and customized according to each student’s learning curve. Pictures and diagrams should be incorporated for easy understanding. During class time, the teachers must make sure that these students are grasping what is being taught and provide individual attention as required. Additional classes must be organised for slow learners in class 5 as they would be joining mainstream schools the following year. It is suggested that the teachers convene for a discussion and come up with a customized curriculum for each slow learner by mid-September.
2. There needs to be clarity on which standard Srihari is part of since he is both younger than his classmates and at a higher academic level. At the moment, he is officially in class 2 (for a second consecutive year) but writing the 3rd standard worksheets. This needs to clarified soon.

3. It is important that the teachers go beyond the syllabus and textbooks. A certain amount of creativity has to incorporated into teaching method and students have to be weaned away from rote learning. Several training programmes are needed for teachers to learning creative and interactive teaching methods which go beyond textbooks.

4. The composition of the team may be relooked and attempt needs to be made to hire young and enthusiastic people who enjoy working with children. This is result in a re-energized team, increased enthusiasm, and more value in learning.

5. A qualified teacher has to be hired for English. The concerned person must have a very good grasp of English and Telugu and must have the ability and inclination to use creating teaching methods such as songs, drama and dance. This is important for improving the overall educational attainments of students.

6. The children need to be trained in English phonetics in order to properly pronounce a combination of letters. Many of the children are still lagging behind in this area.

7. It is suggested that Sashi be made formally in charge of the poultry activity, which has immense educational value. Specific learning goals have to be identified and the students must slowly be introduced to other aspects of animal husbandry.

8. As suggested last year, the gardening activity has to be upgraded. Suggested topics include garden design, seed storage, diversified crops, organic manure, pest control, soil testing, and garden ecology.

9. A supplementary curriculum must be created for all subjects to enrich the learning journey.

10. Children with special needs must be assessed with specific learning targets. At the same time, they should also be encouraged to participate in all activities, both inside and outside the classroom. Individual worksheets must be designed for children with learning disabilities. In order for this to come to fruition, either an external consultant can be hired or a one-week training programme be held to sensitize teachers on how to engage with and educate children with learning disabilities.

11. Special attention must be given to Sainath (class 3), who has mild mental retardation. Special efforts must be taken to understand his learning disability and customized goals for his growth have to be set.