

M Naidu Reward Trust Visit Notes (February 28-March 2, 2023):

Day 1: I reached Chennai 7 PM IST and had a lovely home dinner with Ananthi and Bhaskaran, a couple who dedicate their time and efforts for the students in Reward Trust, where Ananthi is fully responsible also for the accounts of Reward. Then I and Ananthi went to Irumbulichery, a village about 2h from Chennai, in Kanchipuram district, where Reward Trust is located. I met Srikala, the main lead of Reward, who began this Trust with her husband Sridhar who was the leading pillar of Reward. We talked about how Reward was born from Sridhar's vision of an institution where students would have a safe place, away from home while learning, despite strong setbacks such as lack of roads/ transportation and proximity to government schools for the children of seasonal/ daily wages laborers. We exchanged our stories of our interests & backgrounds, and it felt like I had known Ananthi and Srikala for many years, instead of meeting them for the very first time.

Day 2. My visit to schools today, to understand how Reward functions.

Vaddakvayalur school visit.

Social studies lesson presented by Mr. Vadivel.

The 9th std. students (7 girls, 10 boys) were very attentive and participated eagerly in the class lesson. The lesson involved the cost of ingredients and calculating what it would cost to make an edible dish. Then, Mr. Vadivel started lesson in Numismatics where he showed us his collection of metal coins dating from 1920s (figure 1) explaining how the metals are put together to make precious commodities such as coins, gold jewelry etc. It is amazing that he has found some of these coins in school compound itself as its his hobby also to collect them. He was succinct in his logical approach to explaining with sequential show of coins and notes collection. This has been an amazing experience for me, to share few of U.S coins and dollars with this very inspiring class of 9th std. Tamil medium students. He then went into the details of ways to obtain money. Srikala and Ananthi interspersed lessons with life examples, which made the students and even my own experience so exciting. Then, Ananthi further explained different ways to get money by debit and credit card and their advantages and disadvantages.



Next, in the same compound we saw the elementary school experiments which included, different eukaryotic cells models (ciliates also!), blood pressure induced water movement, model of lungs etc., some simple but impressively clear logic and explanations provided by these elementary school students, made by this primary class which had about equal number of girls and boys, some pictures are included here (figure 2).



After this, we visited Vatsala teacher's class for high school students in a computer room, she had a very strong grasp of English with beautiful handwriting and taught with perfect inflections of sounds of vowels/ consonants. (figure 3, Attached picture of teacher, her students and REWARD staff after the lesson). Here is the link to video taken of this lesson. ([Video Link: V1](#))

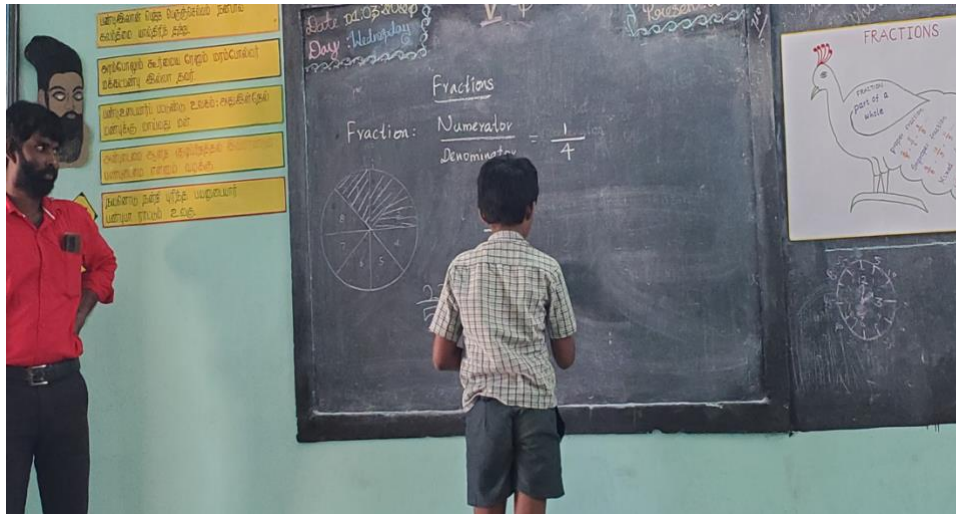


Then, we visited another primary school Math class of 2nd std., where 13 students (7 boys + 6 girls) were demonstrating addition of cost of fruits and vegetables whose pictures with numbers were impressive as were their writings of names of towns and places things in Tamil and English. From these 2nd grade students, about 70% of them are able to count correctly, and pronounce words in English well. They were also able to explain what the words in Tamil meant (figure 4).



Budur school visit in the afternoon.

We started our visit with Mr. Satish's 5th std class where he taught the concept of fractions. He had a lovely peacock poster showing fractions and further demonstrated the fractions by cutting an apple into different fractions. He explained proper and improper fractions, mixed fractions and equivalent fractions. After the teacher demo, some students demonstrated their understanding of these fractions on the board (figure 5). ([Here is the video link for this lesson: V2](#))



Gunvati and her 2nd std. of 14 girls and 8 boys did an amazing job with eggs in salt water displaced by adding a coin in there (I did not get the picture of that experiment!!), they further demonstrated their knowledge of English music words and Science concepts.



Day 3: Annaikat high secondary School.

Srikala and Ananthi had SMART test prize money and certificate distribution scheduled where they gave me the honor of being chief guest for distributing prizes & certificates. It was gratifying to be there as an Asha for Education volunteer, seeing it live where AfE dollars are being used at REWARD. Srikala and Ananthi gave such motivating speeches in Tamil (thank God for growing up with Tamilians, Keralites & Kannadigas, I could understand most of it), essence of it was to motivate students to do their best, explaining where they could reach if they tried hard, citing 13 prize winners (5 subjects) students' examples. Ananthi explained Smart exam and achievements of last year students where one student won 16,500 Rs. Ananthi also asked students to count their breath in 5 mins where some students counted 31 and others counted 18-20, the goal was to de-stress with focus on breath, so learning to slow down with breathing was cited (figure 6, where all students were eagerly awaiting prize ceremony).



We also visited Irulumbichery school where we met with 4 teachers and principal who taught the high school class of 7th std who demonstrated such simple but effective experiments such as models of eyes, lungs, electrolysis of water, ecosystem, microscope & gyroscope. Then speeches given by Srikala, Meghala Rajan (ex Biologist) were superbly motivational, with demos of yoga asanas standing on one feet and balancing. Ananthi explained achievements and purpose of SMART test, and gave background on toppers, their family members were also present, another great way to

keep motivating families to support their students. Finally, ex- BARC Kalpakkam engineer, Rajan babu explained his engineering background and how he got there and retired as engineer at the Avni reactor at Kalpakkam. He spoke softly but clearly. Then it was my turn to say a few words, which I began with Kala as my translator where I could only tell students my story and try and motivate them by how it has worked for me, listening to my teachers and parents, giving 150-200% to get results between 75-90%!

In the afternoon we visited another elementary school (I can't recall its name, sorry about that), where an MA, B. Ed teacher demonstrated the students' ability to do additions for her 4-5th std. classes.(6 girls and 13 boys). They got it right every time! For English lesson, we had a boy who stuttered read, but he kept going, I was so delighted that he did not give up. Then the teacher taught prepositions, where she had some difficulty with explaining differences between under and below. This was a class of a very high achieving 4-5th std. Students who were eager to answer, had excellent command on their English. They knew their planets both in English and in Tamil. I am absolutely amazed with their confidence, fearlessness, and eagerness to know the right answer. Such students truly inspire me in my small role as a Asha for Education volunteer.

Finally, I gave REWARD teachers a google meet talk on March 2nd, explaining what motivated me to become a scientist and how I navigated my journey being student at school, college, university and the US, with hope that a few would find it useful.