Dear Suba,

Here are some features and pointers based on my visit to REWARD TRUST on 25th September 2010. I read through the 2008 visit report by Baskar Venkateswaran, an Asha member, which you had sent to me. Baskar's visit was actual visit to the schools environment where the teachers work. You may recall we had arranged my visit to be observation of Teacher Refresher Course to get a perspective on that training aspect of the organisation.

In this report, let me focus on features and data that may be relevant to project evaluation as well as to chalk out future collaboration between Asha and REWARD.

Sridhar and Kalavathi have experience in the field of educational service for over two decades. The formal organisational aspects seem to taken shape in the last 3 to 4 years, initially accounting done through Asha Bangalore, before taking off as an independent REWARD (Rural Education Welfare and Resource Development) Trust.

- Since Asha is seen as a parent organisation and not just as one among many funding groups, there is an understandable emotional warmth towards as well as expectation of understanding from Asha members.
- Since the organisation is yet to get permanent FCRA approval, there is also a need to pre-planning to account for approval delays to avoid cash flow crunches.

Core Group of REWARD

(a) Sridhar and Kalavathi

　　Dr.Sridhar – Scientific Officer D, Material Science Group (Theory), IGCAR, Kalpakkam

　　Dr.Kalavathi - Scientific Officer F, Condensed Matter Physics (Experimentalist), IGCAR, Kalpakkam

(b) Dr. Natarajan (Retd), IGCAR

　　Dr. S.V.M. Satyanarayana, IGCAR

　　Dr. Sengathir, Mathematics Professor, Thiruninravur Central University

　　Mrs. Anandhi Baskaran, Commerce Graduate (Worked with Auroville Isai Ambalam School, Primary Education). She specializes in primary education with emphasize on ABL Methods and Phonetics.

Around the core group there is a large support circle of Kalpakkam community from which resources are drawn as and when required.

Sridhar and Kalavathi have been involved in two kinds of educational service work since 1987.

(i) School upgradation – ie. upgrading schools from 10th Std to 12th Std or (8th to 10th Std) in villages neighbouring villages. This involves appealing to authorities, organizing the villagers and also collecting funds for upgradation deposit.

- The teacher support program can be seen as a logical outgrowth of this. After upgradation, they found while the higher classes are started, new teachers are not appointed in time, or the teacher-student ratio is woefully inadequate, especially in the higher classes just approved.

(ii) Personally supporting a few children in their house for the crucial years of 11th and 12th Std. Over the years, a few post-doctoral researchers, teachers, a doctor have come out of this.

- I understand there is now an ongoing process to formalise this with Asha as a Support-A-Child scheme.

Teacher Selection and Evaluation :

The teacher selection and evaluation process in REWARD is a fascinating aspect. I give a few interesting features of the process.

- This is a result of highly analytical minded people involved in the core group. REWARD could be asked to codify this for the benefit of similar projects elsewhere.

(i) Teacher Selection: The teacher is interviewed by a panel consisting of School Head Master/Mistress, PTA President, Panchayat President, REWARD Trustees.

- Since the HM is involved, teacher is selected for a particular school, not selected by REWARD and then placed based on demand. Giving a decision-making role to school and village authorities is a commendable move by REWARD, lending a sense of collaboration and belonging to everyone involved.

(ii) Teacher Salary is not uniform or just based on years of service. The starting salaries are based on the qualification of the teacher at the time of appointment.

Current Monthly Scale of REWARD teacher is

$$Rs.\,4500\ for +2,\ Rs.\,5500\ for\ UG,\ Rs.\,6500\ for\ PG\ \text{qualified teachers}$$

- Compared to PTA appointed teachers who are given a honararium of Rs. 500 this is a respectable salary and can be regarded by the teacher. But REWARD teachers' qualification is comparable to Government teachers whereas PTA teachers may not be as qualified or motivated. Compared to government appointed teachers whose salaries are Rs.25000 per month(thanks to the *6th pay commission*), the REWARD teachers are grossly underpaid.

(iii) The annual increment and the annual bonus(incentive) are based on quality of service. Quality of Service is measured by an elaborate year-round Teacher Evaluation which are based on weighted average of numerous inputs including,

(a) Evaluation by HM

(b) Individual Evaluation by REWARD Trustees

(c) Extempore Teaching (during Refresher Courses)

(d) Assignments and Projects Given to Teachers during the year

(e) Performance Record of Students in Public Exams or Annual Exams

(f) Attendance Record of Teacher in School

The teachers are aware of the inputs, but the relative weights are announced only at the end of the year. The incentives are distributed to the teachers at the end of the year in a function by inviting a noted scientist or academician as chief guest. Each teacher is given full analysis of the reasons behind their incentive decision.
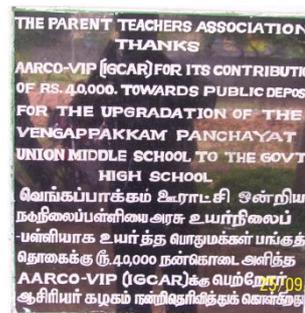
My interaction with the teachers

I spent the first half of the day as an observer of the teachers refresher course. The second of the day we dedicated to an interactive discussion with the teachers.

Monthly Refresher Course

The venue of the refresher course is always one of the schools with which REWARD is engaged and this keeps changing.

The Refresher course in September 2010, which I attended, was held in Vengappakkam school. A few years ago, Sridhar & Kalavathi had played a key role in upgrading this school from middle school to high school, which is recorded in the stone plaque.

For the teacher evaluation, the teachers are chosen in random to give an extempore lecture. The

choice of topic is left to the teacher. So, all teachers come prepared in a topic they are currently teaching in their class.

We had four lectures in the first half of the day.

1) The first was by Boologam, He picked up *'Thiruvadi Thozhutha Padalam',* a topic from 12th Std Tamil. This is the part of Kamban's Ramayanam where Hanuman informs Sri Ram of Sita's situation in Lanka. He did a very good job in explaining the versus word by word and Kamban's poetic genius. Sampath Kumar (also Tamil teacher) added a few grammatical points that students must note.

2) Lalitha took 5th Std Science topic of simple machines. She had brought many objects like like nutcracker, scissors, etc. to the class and used them to effectively explain the concepts.

3) Tanuja took a class from 12th Std Social Studies. The topic was 1st World War 1914-1918. She used many charts and maps to explain the background and how the war started and proceeded.

4) Sowmya took a class on 9th Std Chemistry – on Classification of Chemical Reactions. She used Flexiboards to explain the theoretical ideas first. She had also brought chemicals to show some reactions. Eg. She showed how Iron & Zinc are able to displace copper from a solution of copper sulphate. Teachers also note that the Zinc displacement reaction proceeds faster. Significantly, all costs for purchasing the chemicals and lab equipments were borne by Sowmya.

- Costs of Lab Equipments and Chemicals must be borne by the organisation as these increase the effectiveness of the project several fold.
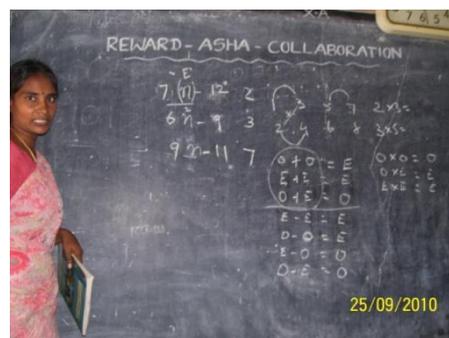
Overall these extempore lectures, question & answer sessions, discussions, followup work emphasize the need for teacher's own clarity of basic concepts and for lucidity in teaching of the same to the children.

- The lectures session can be recorded on audio-visual and can be shared with other similar projects elsewhere as an example of how teachers workshop and review should be.

Just before lunch, Sridhar gave a simple puzzle to be solved by the teachers during the break.

How many prime number sets of the form $\{(3n-4), (4n-5), (5n-3)\}$ *can be formed with n being a natural number ?*

The problem was solved by Radha (Computer Science teacher) during the break and she gave her answer and proof soon after lunch break. This specific problem tests one's grasp of concepts at the level of 8th Std Maths. Such problems are given out as puzzle to be solved are meant to develop the teachers' interest and understanding in Maths.

Interactive Session :

The second half of day in refresher course, usually, the teachers are split into primary and high school teachers. However, for this month, the second half, was combined into a interactive session.

Strengths and Weaknesses

First I wanted to know what the teachers think as the strengths and weaknesses of being teachers in government schools yet not government teachers themselves.
Here are the points brought forth by the teachers.

Strength	Weakness
Teaching children sharpens my knowledge of the subject	We have to satisfy both expectations of school HM and Reward Trustees.
Unlike government teachers, we do not involve in nonacademic work like census,etc. We focus on teaching	As a substitute for government teachers(say on medical leave), we are made to teach subjects in which we dont have expertise.
Children are friendly with Reward teachers, but maintain a distance from most government teachers.	There is some discrimation between teachers. For example, Reward teachers (Koovathur) are not allowed to do flag-hoisting at morning prayer.
We have more freedom to try new teaching methods.	We are not sent for Government training.
Government teachers work from time to time – arrive at 9 am and leave by 4:30 on bell. We are self-motivated and work based on student needs, esp for 10th and 12th Std.	When student performance analysis is done, our names are not in official government records for giving due credit.
I feel I am doing a service ie. government teachers earn Rs.25000 and we earn Rs.6000 or less.	

Regarding some of the weaknesses mentioned, there were discussions, indicating these could be HM-dependent. For instance, some Reward teachers (like Sujatha of Nerumbur) have gone for ABL training and some (like Bharatidasan, Rajalakshmi) have even done board exam paper evaluation. Murthy (Vengambakkam) said all teachers are like friends and he has not faced any discrimination.

Achievements
Next the teachers shared what they thought as their achievements as Reward teachers.

Tanuja : My students have shown improvement in hand writing and cleanliness.

Radha : I was very satisfied in successively organising the Independence Day Dance Program in our school. I also helped my students to win three prizes at the district level competitions.

Ezhilarasi : Copying in exam was rampant. My students have stopped copying.
Sridevi : My house in near the school. I go to school by 8:45 am and clean the school before it starts. One student Gokuldas was absent for most of 1st Std. But after I joined, he is showing regular attendance now in 2nd Std.

Revathi : I teach 60 students Social studies. Student will be silent and studying even if I'm late or absent for a class. I have shown 94 %, 100 % and 88 % pass for last three years.

Deepa : I have shown 100 % pass result in 12th Std Computer Science. Total maximum strength is 85 students.

Divya : Students were avoiding and hating maths. Now they are showing interest and I am making the maths classes interactive and enjoyable.

Malliga : I teach 9th/10th Std students. I am making them to tead in library, do essay writing.

Anitha : Teaching 1st Std since 2 weeks. One boy Vignesh was beating other children. He avoided me for one week. But within another week I have managed to befriend him. He has stopped beating other children and also participates classroom activities.

Bhuvaneswari – Teaches Social Studies. In 7th Std I handle 50 students. The children were unable to read Tamil at 7th Std level. Since Jan to April I have been teaching them Tamil reading skills. Many have learnt to read Tamil now.

Logeswari : I have been working as English teacher with Reward for 1 ½ years. I could say my children are becoming more conversant in English than Tamil.

Sowmya : I teach Chemistry. I have improved the 10th Std pass performance in Science from 50% to 90% . Other teachers are also following my teaching methods. I was to bring up poor performing students.

Kamakshi : I have maintained 100 % pass in 10th Std English for the past 3 years. One student was taking lots of leave in 9th Std, he was failing in English. I have taken special care of this boy, he got 3rd rank in the recent 1st Midterm exam.

Indira : I am in the Pandur school from Prayer to Closing the school. I give my students exam scoring tips. I have got 88% and 93% pass in 10th Social Studies in the past 2 years.

Revathi : I have introduced students saving scheme, Say No to Plastics in School Campus campaign, Tree Planting and many ideas in my school. My work in the Thenpattinam school was recently recognised and appreciated by the AEO.

Amala : I teach 10th Std Tamil in Thiruvathur school. Our school has just 16 teachers for student strength of 1200. I pushed the pass results from 15 out of 65 to 36 out of 65 in 4 months time.

Gunavathy : My children were shy and had difficulty in talking but now can read to visitors.
Malarvizhi : The children at Keezhar Kollai were irregular and not clean. Now they take bath daily, and come to school in uniform.

Kamakshi : I teach 1st Std children. They used to constantly cry and ask for mother when I joined. Now they connect well with me. They are disciplined in the class and can sing some rhymes.

Lalitha : I have helped my children to reach in English without fear.

Ilayakkiya : I teach English in Pulikundram. One 3rd Std student, Monisha, was very reticent and would not interact with anyone. I tried hard to interact with her and now she is friendly with other children. She does writing in the class on her own.

Shenbagam : I teach 1st Std students in Pulikundram. Two students, Premkumar and Ebinesh in my class were neither reading nor talking in the class. Now they have become friendly with everyone. Along with Ilayakkiya I conducted the cultural program of my students for the entire school.

Logambal : I had students who can write but cannot read fluently. I learnt about phonetics from Anandhi Madam. I used sounds and songs to teach reading to my students.

Mahalakshmi : I have a 3rd Std student Natarajan. He is playful and tends to distract other students. His tongue always gets stuck to the top and had difficulty in reading. I gave him freedom and also extra care. He is now able to read sentences. I also found he is ambidextrous and can write in mirror image also.

Shivakumar : I teach in Manamai P.S. During Lunch break I help in Tamil reading and memorizing Multiplication tables.

Rajarajan, M. Sc, M. Phil (Biology) : I teach 11th & 12th Std Biology. I also 7th Std class teacher. I can claim to have made my class students free from stage fear. I also create and demonstrate Biology experiments for my students. I give specimens to other teachers also.

S. Suresh : I am English teacher in Sogandi H.S. I went to students who were very poor in academics. In 7th Std English it was a situation of 40% pass. Now I get 29 out of 31 to pass. I take special attention to a 9th Std girl student who is hearing impaired.

Delhi Ganesan : I work in Manamai school. In my school, the classroom has chairs, but students come to class without pencils or pens. Last year I achieved 10th Std Science result of 74 %.

Boologam : I take class for nearly 900 students in the school. I take 11th & 12th Std Tamil. I have 220 students in 12th Std. Many of my students are taller and stronger than me, but they listen and obey my word. My work is recognised by the school Head Master and Supervisors.

Sampath Kumar : I handle Tamil for 487 students in Koovathur school. My pass percentage in the past two years is as follows :
10th Std - 97 % and 83 % (Tamil was the highest pass percentage of all subjects)
12th Std – 188 out of 200 pass and 175 out of 181 pass

Every year, I donate 20 % of my salary for giving prizes to students of Koovathur based on performance in Board Exams as follows.
  10th Std : 1st Rank in Tamil – Rs. 1000
            1st Rank in all Subjects – Rs. 1000

 12th Std : 1st Rank in Tamil – Rs. 5000
            1st Rank in all Subjects – Rs. 5000

This I am doing in honour of the Head Master of my school, and do encourage students to do well in Board Exams.

- What Sampath Kumar is doing through his annual prize scheme is something unique. He must be recognized and encouraged in his efforts.

Gnanaprakasam : I teach 9th Std Maths and 11th /12th Computer Science in Thiruvathur. I got 176 out of 200 pass in 12th Std.

Ranjith Kumar : I teach Social Studies in Koovathur for 10th & 12th Std for 9 years. I maintained 96 % pass in the past 9 years. Last year the school took the 10th Std class from me and the performance dropped to 70 % pass. This year I have been reassigned 2 sections (out of 5) . I will try to bring back above 90% pass.

Mohan Kumar : I teach Tamil in 9th / 10th Std at Pandur. This year I have 17 students who are unable to even read and write properly. Last 2 years I got pass percentages of 91 % (68 students) and 89 % (75 students). I am friendly with the students and organize special classes to give extra attention.

Stalin Raj : I am teaching Science in Vayalur for the past 2 years. I worked earlier as Lab Assistant before becoming a REWARD teacher. I encourage children to take the Rural Talent Exam conducted by TN Government. I have shown in the Laptop Computer, Science experiments available in YouTube. I do science experiments in the class with my students. Other teachers also want to use the experiments developed by me.

Kannan : I teach Social Studies in Neelamangalam. When I joined the school computer was neatly clothed and maintained by remained unused. I used it to first learn computer myself. Now I use the PC to teach Social studies.
 I undertake fieldwork in Social Research, I share my passion for such research with my students. I recently researched the *Kalvettu Amaippukal* (stone carvings) in *Kudavolai*.
 I have obtained help from donors like Lions Club to give uniforms to Irular tribal students and Mic and PC as donation to the school. I have also taught 8th Std English. I taught the children to use the dictionary.

Kumerasen : I have B.Sc (Zoology) degree. I teach Computer Science, Maths in Neelamangalam. I discourage students to copy mechanically from blackboard to their notebooks. In 8th Std Maths, all my students passed. In computers, through hands-on learning, my children can use MS Office and MS Paint. I also obtain Science and Nature CD and show to my students.

- Work of teachers such as Stalin Raj, Kannan, Kumerasen can be encouraged and enhanced by supplying them with good and relevant educational CDs and softwares.

Loganathan : I teach 10th Std Maths in Vayalur. I increased the pass percentage in the school from 18 % to 60 %. I got Rs. 1000 gift . I decided to learn more after becoming a REWARD teacher. I have completed B.Ed and am now doing M.Sc. Since then, the pass percentage in the school has been 52 %, 92 %, 88 %.

Yogeeswaran : I come from a agricultural family. I have been teaching 10th Std Maths in Pandur for the past year. Last year, even with limited time, I got 77 % pass in Maths, whereas the overall pass percentage was only 65 %. This year I will get a much better result.

Murthy : I completed my B.Ed after joining REWARD. I teach 10th Std Science for the past 5 years. The pass percentage in my class has been 71 %, 81 %, 100%, 100 % , 100 %, 96 %. This year I hope to get back 100 % pass.

Conclusion :
As a pedagogically focused quality enhancement of the government school system this project is one of its kind in Tamil Nadu. I commend you and Asha for recognizing the value of the supporting such a project. I have given suggestions for intervention intext in the report above.

 I will highly recommend this project for continued support and further well-planned expansion.
             Thanking You for your patience.

                                                                                            Yours Truly,
                                                                                            S. Shanmuganathan