

Minutes from Conference Call with Jeevan Gyanodaya (February 10, 2009)

On call: Shankar, Sarika, Palani, Aravind, Divya (Asha-UC) and Mr. Devarajan (JG)

Translation from Tamil by: Aravind (thanks so much!)

“S”- Shankar; “D”- Mr. Devarajan (of JG)

begin conversation

S: Mr. D, why don't you start .. what's up in general?

D: kids are preparing for exams...in March...only a month or so left, so they're concentrating on that...this time they're starting 10th standard early...normally it starts in June....but they find that they can't finish portions in one year

S: last time we talked about parent-teacher interaction; you've been with us for 2 years....how much has this improved over the past 2 years?

D: currently we talk to parents of day scholars...they usually sit with the kids and attend a few classes...to understand what's going on...it is helpful for teachers as well...other schools normally do not allow parents to attend classes...this is something that JG is doing new...now there is a plan to involve other parents too...two teachers will go to the homes of the kids on Saturdays...these are kids who live outside Chengalpatt

S: do parents come to school or other way around?

D: teachers go to the kids' homes....parents of day scholars come to class daily for about half an hour...

S: how are parents able to come? normally parents don't have time because they work in the fields they themselves go home very late, right?

D: I myself went to the parents and explained that this is imp...that spending half an hour with the kids in school is useful...parents of hostel kids usually come once in 2-3 months...now they are requested to come every second Sunday...kids' speech has improved a lot...

S: are students conscious when parents are around?

D: no they are fine with parents in class. there were some initial hiccups....now everything is smooth

S: do parents appreciate value of coming?

D: initially they didn't...said that whatever happens is between teacher & kids...but now they understand what's going on...are able to learn some of the methods to help coach kids at home...first we concentrated on the parents of day scholars and then tackled those of hostel students

(Shankar recaps the conversation.)

S: what is your personal impression - is this working?

D: firstly parents are able to appreciate the value of JG...they know difficulty of handling one kid...and seeing JG handle so many... they are impressed...they are also able to give their feedback...right now they come daily, but afterwards they could come less frequently.

D: many of the parents can't read or write...but they are able to help with speech at home

S: great... let's continue this for some more time and see results.

S: talked to you about 2 profs coming to JG...they want to know what JG expects of them...they want to interact with parents & teachers and participate in social events

D: first one week I want teachers to learn the correct methods from them...Second, (didn't catch that)... third... want to arrange a one day seminar with parents...and possibly a small outing with parents...parents kids and teachers...think so, will ask...finally if they could share their experiences and give feedback, motivation, etc.

S; you do know that both profs are deaf right?

D: yes...I've told the teachers that...yes ...right now not all teachers can't speak English fluently...so I've arranged a Mrs. Ramakrishnan who will be with them to help translate.

D: there's also a Mrs. Amruthavalli who takes class for the teachers on Sundays since January....she helps train teachers about IQ tests, new methods... she helps teachers design classes and how to take care of the portions...forming lesson plan

S: what new things is she teaching?

D: how to help students fare better...how to help explain concepts...nothing very different.

D: she worked in Kanyakumari in a school for the deaf...she's not hearing impaired...she has about 30 years experience...she helps teachers fine-tune their teaching...the current teachers were working in her school previously...she tells how long classes should be and how to include breaks...how to teach lessons in a way that children understand. She is providing some monitoring and evaluation of their teaching methods... especially for smaller classes. There's a lot of portion in the textbooks and she explains how all that can be covered. She also taught teaching methods such as speech techniques.

S; how do you know her?

D: she was the one who taught my son originally. She's helped me all the way as JG grew, and I asked her to help supply trained teachers. That is how she was able to select qualified teachers for JG. After recommending teachers I asked her to keep coming to JG every week or so....to help them out...I give her conveyance and some remuneration for her trouble...

S: Are teachers ok with working on Sundays?

D: Except a few teachers almost all of them work on Sundays. There are some regular classes held on Sundays too (?)

S: What is the hotel accommodation charge?

D: Per day charge is Rs 1100 for an AC room...non-AC rooms are about 300-400 (this is for the profs who are planning go to JG)

S: One of the reasons to start ITI was because of lack of job opportunities for kids after 10th, plus they may not fit in some job roles. So, is there any way to improve confidence of kids? Since kids spend most of their time in school, they may not interact with too many others, do you think interacting with other school kids or other deaf school kids will help?

D: We have organized a meeting with other deaf schools students on August 17-19 this year, which will be attended by around 100 deaf school kids from all over TN.

S: This issue is particularly pertinent because kids are not going stay in the school all through.

D: Gives an example of a student, who has managed to not only get a job but live comfortably with the remaining society...so, it does not appear to be a confidence issue related to isolation in the school-based isolation. I am not sure about ITI graduates, but the school graduates are doing well enough.

S: What feedback do students give after they graduate?

D: They are very happy. They are able to earn a living and manage well. One example...a family had 3 deaf kids, they all attended JG. After one graduated, all the money he earned was being used to support family, so came and asked me for a loan to build a house, with confidence that he could earn and slowly repay the loan. Most students are doing much better than expected.

S: Why do you think there are problems in finding jobs?

D: It's not just limited to deaf students...all students who only finish 10th standard have trouble finding jobs. Apart from manual labor (like a sweepers job), most other jobs demand higher qualifications, which is why I started ITI, etc. I'm starting a new course in ITI...welding and turning. I am going to request money for this from Asha Austin.

S: Please send proposal soon so that Asha Austin can start process here- without it, they cannot begin a review.

D: Will send the proposal in a couple of days.

S: We discussed your proposal in the meeting last week. Last year we funded 4 teachers, and this year you wanted to increase salary...yet, the salary amount seem to have decreased from last year?

S: This year you wanted to increase salary, but salary amount seem to have decreased.

D: Last year was for 4 teachers and this year 6 teachers... (explanation is unclear)...basic salary is 6k, plus benefits like food, travel, etc. Last year, cash in hand salary was 6k and this year it is also 6k. The increments will be handled using local donations

S: How many teachers did you recruit last year?

D: 6, and they are still continuing.

S: You said that govt teachers get better salaries & benefits...

D: These teachers are just diploma holders. They can't apply for those jobs. They have to do a two year course to be qualified to apply for those jobs. That's why I took these teachers so that they are not likely to go away.

S: How many new teachers have been recruited this year?

D: 5 - As for the old teachers, I am thinking Mrs. Sasikala can handle the ITI .. Mrs. Hemalatha handles (missed)...neither of them is trained though, so instead of sending them away, I have put them on other classes which don't need training.

S: how is the marriage hall proceeding? You said that after hall is over it will take about 2 years for JG to stand on its own feet...

D: Once the marriage hall is built, we expect monthly 10 lakhs or so, and that should cover teachers salary- food will be taken care of through local donation. Total Asha support is around 19 lakhs, around 12 lakhs is used for teaching & nonteaching staff and the rest is for infrastructure, hearing aids, etc which are one-time expenses. So, I expect that marriage hall funds will be sufficient to support running expenses. Over the past 20 years we've built so many things: school, ITI, hostel, etc, and have one more goal- the marriage hall which will finish by Oct this year. My next goal is to set up a trust which will manage JG even without my direct supervision. In another 3-4 years, I expect to be free. The funds for the hall come not from direct donation but by saving bit by bit.

D: Was anyone affected by the new economic downturn amongst you? I feel concerned for you people.

S: Yes, but we are all students, so we are okay...

S: Is there a maintenance grant from govt?

D: Yes there is...grant given for food for students between 6-14 years. There are a lot of hiccups, lots of formalities to get done in order to get the grant sanctioned. Even with maintenance grant ..money is not enough to fund food for kids...can Asha give money to us for food, and or for ITI development- teaching materials?

S; Please send proposal .. we will consider it...no guarantees, but we or Austin can at least review it. If we find any source of money we will do our best.

D: What is your organization's feedback regarding the marriage hall?

Divya: We are all in support and we're happy that this is going through

S: We hope other projects also take up projects like this.

Divya: could you send a video of your annual day function, as you had mentioned previously?

D: Will send to S's madras address, will also send annual report. I will also send audit report in June. About the professors who want to visit: what are their plans? what will they eat?

S: Profs will stay with you for the weekdays (5 days), and may go off for weekends. Do you have any questions for us?

D: No further questions...everything is going fine, but would be nice if other chapters could interact with us as regularly as your chapter does.

S: Can't say much about other chapters - you will have to talk to them about it increased interactions/conference calls yourself.

D: There's going to be a full survey in April, to find out how many students to take, etc. The Board exam is on 24th march, and 14 (or 16?) students will take it this time.

S: That's all the questions we have for now, thank you for talking to us.

end of conversation