

Raju Sharma

**Sang Tshalamthang Govt. Secondary School,
East Sikkim**

Email id: razeverraz@gmail.com

Abstract

The challenges being faced by this school are declining enrolment rate, poor communication skill in children and unattractive classrooms. While interacting with the villagers, the school head found that they chose private schools for 'spoken english'. He conducted a meeting with his teachers and discussed about the matter; he encouraged his teachers to speak English at school. But at the same time it was found that students were reluctant to speak as their vocabulary was poor. The school then provided each classroom with an extra white board where everyday a new sentence was written in English along with its Nepali translation. One of the challenges for the school head was beautification of the classrooms, which was personally undertaken by him. There has been a significant shift in the perception of villagers. It has become a practice to share good stories during the school assembly in which not only the students but also the school head and the teachers take part equally.

Socio-Cultural Context of the School

Rural education is always considered in comparison to urban education. There are other dichotomies-including governments versus private schools; commitment of teachers and the language of instruction {the first language (ENGLISH in Sikkim's context) is typically a foreign tongue and a status symbol to people in rural areas}.

Sang Tshalamthang Government Secondary School in East Sikkim is located in a rural area. There is an English Medium Private School (REHMA ENGLISH SCHOOL) in the vicinity of the Government Secondary School. Though there is not much facility at the private school, many of the village people have admitted their children at that private school.

Challenges: Declining enrolment rate, poor communication skill in children, Students are indiscipline and lack moral values, and the school with unattractive classrooms.

This Is Where We Are...
Main Challenges for the School
Beating the Odds

1. Case #: Changing the mind sets of the community towards Government School

In the year 2016, new Headmaster 'Mr. Raju Sharma' joined the Sang Tshalamthang Government Secondary School. As the enrolment of the Government Secondary School was very low, he casually enquired with the villagers regarding their choice of the private school. He came to know that the villagers had one and only reason for their choice of the private school- 'spoken English', which was emphasized at that private school. He conducted a meeting with his teachers and discussed about the matter; he could encourage his teachers to implement spoken English at the school. But at the same time he was told that the students were very poor in English as they lack vocabulary.

The Headmaster of the school came up with an idea and provided each classroom with an extra white board. This particular white board was used as an English corner; where everyday a new sentence was written in English along with its Nepali translation and by the end of the day students shall memorize the sentence. For this, Headmaster himself started writing simple sentences in English on a daily basis and at the end of the day; he ensured that the students of each class have memorized the sentence. In this manner, every year the students had a chance to learn more than 200 new sentences (as per RTE Act, 2009, we have not less than 220 working days each year) which helped them enrich their vocabulary.

As the news spread, the following year the Panchayat member of the village took out her three grandchildren out of the private school and enrolled them at the Government Secondary School. These days, the students of the Government Secondary School try to talk in English and the enrolment of the school has also increased a little. Now the villagers have started changing their mindsets towards the school. Use of innovative idea could bring about a shift in the mindset of the community members, who instead of devaluing the Government School, started to enroll their children there.

These days, Headmaster need not write the sentences on the board- rather the senior students of the school have taken charge of the English corner of lower classes and the English teachers have been taking care of senior classes. In this way, more leaders have been created in the school for the sustenance of the innovative practices.



Fig: English Corner for learning one new sentence every day in every class.

2. Case #: Inculcating Moral Values in the children

Inculcating moral values in the children has become a major concern today. Sang Tshalamthang Government Secondary School in East Sikkim was also facing challenges in inculcating good values. Hence, during a monthly staff meeting, it was decided that the school will adopt some innovative methods to make students learn good values.

In this regard, under the weekend home work the students were asked to spend sufficient time with their parents and grandparents at home. They were further asked to listen to the good stories from their grandparents. In the week days, students were encouraged to share their stories in the evening assembly; out of which the story with good moral was appreciated by the Headmaster.

In this way, students were not only prevented from mixing up with unruly children at the weekends, but also a culture of learning good things from the parents and grandparents was developed.

These days, it has become a practice to share good stories during the school assembly in which not only the students but also the Headmaster and the teachers take part equally.

3. Case #: Zero Investment Initiative for making- Attractive Classrooms

One of the challenges for the School Head was beautification of the classrooms. With the limited funds under SSA and RMSA, it was not possible to make all the classrooms colorful. We got 2-3 containers of left-over paints to the school. During the free time, I started to paint the walls of a room meant for the Kindergartens. When the walls were ready with the background paints, we (me and my staff) started drawing the word pictures. By now, other teachers had also started to bring left over paints from their homes and made the possible contributions in the form of left over paints or manual labor for the painting work. Ultimately, a colorful room for Kindergarten was ready with almost no extra investment.

This particular idea clicked to most of the class teachers who then started to request every subject teachers to contribute left over paints for the beautification purpose. As a result, many of our classrooms have got beautifully painted. Senior classes have even covered their outer walls with beautiful quotes and other grammatical uses.



Fig: Colorful Room for Kindergartens

Visible Results of Transformation

Case #: Now the villagers have started changing their mindsets towards the school. Use of innovative idea could bring about a shift in the mindset of the community members, who instead of devaluing the Government school, started to enroll their children there. In the year 2016, there were only 3 students in our junior most class; this year i.e. 2018 we have 14 students in KG.

These days, Headmaster need not write the sentences on the board- rather the senior students of the school have taken charge of the English corner of lower classes and the English teachers have been taking care of senior classes. In this way, more leaders have been created in the school for the sustenance of the innovative practices.



Fig: Student Leader-Maintaining English Corner

Fig: Students Who Left Private School & Joined Ours

- **Case 2 #:** The idea of painting their dream classrooms with left over paints clicked to most of the class teachers who then started to request every subject teachers to contribute left over paints for the beautification purpose. As a result, many of our classrooms have got beautifully painted. Senior classes have even covered their outer walls with beautiful quotes and other grammatical uses.



Fig: Classrooms –Before Innovative Measures



Fig: Teacher Painting- Student painting

Fig: Colorful Classrooms and Exterior



- Case 3 #:** These days, it has become a practice to share good stories during the school assembly in which not only the students but also the Headmaster and the teachers take part equally. In this way, students were not only prevented from mixing up with unruly children at the weekends, but also a culture of learning good things from the parents and grandparents was developed.



Fig: Student Sharing a Story

Fig: Students Sharing their cooking, Skill learnt from mother

Further Areas for Change or Transformation

Rural schools and communities continue to face substantial challenges with high rates of inadequate education level, geographical diversity, and students with special needs.

For generations, infrastructure, leadership, teacher retention and higher education have been in short supply in remote schools. At a glance, it doesn't even appear that there's anything wrong.

Kids in rural areas appear to have it pretty good. Their schools are half the size of urban ones and their classes are smaller. They do pretty well on tests on an average. But it is somewhat like- "Racing alone and coming first." When they have to share a common platform with urban students, it is then when they find themselves incompetent and that is one of the reasons why our rural students do not continue their higher education.

At the school level, rural communities face significant challenges. Here are a few challenges that we have been facing at our rural school:

1. ***Finding and keeping committed staff members:*** One of the most significant challenge is finding and keeping committed staff members in school. Most of the rural school staffs are busy trying for a transfer to some favorable place.

Here, an amicable transfer policy could go a long way if implemented properly.

2. ***Traditional teaching-learning processes:*** Our rural schools need able leaders to lead the team of staff members. It's not surprising that, under able leadership, the rural Schools will go from traditional(children at desks, teachers in the front of the room) modern approach in teaching and administrating school.

Nobody wants and likes changes, because one has to adapt to a new situation; and they tend to think, 'This is how I was taught, this is good for me and it should be good for others too.' But we have to understand that we must adapt with the changing scenario and learn to accept that what we're doing might be good for us but not for the present generations."

An able leadership bringing about a shift from a traditional to contemporary teaching-learning; we just have to try, at least.

3. ***Absenteeism:*** Absenteeism is another big concern at rural schools; be it teachers or the students. Teachers have excuses like social obligations (attending local functions and

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funerals) and students can have an array of excuses ranging from household work to distance between homes and school.

Good and well planned trainings along with counseling are must for the teachers, and also certain incentives or acknowledgements for most regular staff members might help with the issue. Students can also be motivated through, “Most Regular Student Award” or “Super Mom Award”-for the mother of a most regular student.

Fig: Most Regular Teacher Award-2017



School Leader and Transformation

Successful transformation of our school has made me believe that any goal or success we want to achieve – whether it’s a solo or group effort – has to start with ourselves: everything else is consequential to how we act as a leader.

“Today I am a leader as well as a follower”....

In the day-to-day running of a team or a School affair, it’s easy to get caught up in so many considerations that we begin to lose sight of what our values are and why we’re doing the work in the first place.

Our identities can become quickly lost in the paperwork, the meetings, the presentations and the team making processes.

Fortunately, for having an experience of more than a month under SLD Programme, today, I am capable of being both a leader and a follower, and that I can figure out the right time for each role based on the situation.

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For example, “I tend to be the leader in most situations, though I can think of plenty of times when it was better for the group or team’s sake for me to follow along.”

All the trials and errors so far, has made me believe that by demonstrating that we can be both a leader and a follower, we’ll show our staff members that we are the true team players and committed for school’s purpose.

As the saying goes, “If you don’t know where to go, how can you expect to reach there?” Likewise, many a times, we get so caught up in the doing that we forget about the destination.

Having to stop, discuss with the staff members and change course where necessary doesn’t point to failed leadership; rather, it shows true leadership through the strength and courage to change direction, no matter how far we’ve travelled in the other direction.

***Be a Leader not a Boss because it’s easy to be a Boss and say “do it” and
challenging but fulfilling to be a Leader and say “let’s do it.”***