

Theme: Leadership for Skills-based and Vocational Education

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School: **Barisha Janakalyan Vidyapith for Girls (HS)**

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Introduction:

With the post-pandemic dropout rates increasing dramatically in our school, it was evident that immediate measures to curb it need to be put in place. Also, students' lack of attention as well as interest in academic and co-curricular activities after coming back to school proved to be a challenge. Further, with the habit of being engaged in mobile phones for prolonged periods during the pandemic, the students had lost touch with offline classroom engagement and barely spoke to each other or responded in class.

To address these challenges and bring about transformative change in our learners, a novel **skills-based entrepreneurial project** was designed and implemented which provided experiential guidance towards building learners' **21st century competencies-Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity**—together with focusing on student retention along with increased learner attendance and attention. Thus began the journey of Barisha Janakalyan Vidyapith for Girls yearly entrepreneurial project, called "**Janakalyan Shilpudyog Mela**", started in 2022 and now in its third successful year since inception, where inspiring our girls to be economically self-reliant is the primary focus.



The Entrepreneurship Mela Banner

The Mela Venue-Our School Playground

Project Background:

Our school, primarily catering to under-resourced girls who are first-generation learners, has an urban location in South Kolkata. However, the bulk of the students come from suburban areas where stigmas attached to women earning their living still persists. Also, girls are

encouraged to take up mundane 9 to 5 jobs near their homes, rather than exploring far more attractive options available to them. Added to these, in the post-pandemic scenario, when our girls came back to school after the long hiatus, they seemed uninspired and lacking a vision for their future. Learning about these challenges from my conversations with the girls, I felt they needed something **beyond the curriculum** to inspire them and bring much-needed hope into their lives. With this premise in mind, I devised the “Janakalyan Shilpudyog Mela” as a **holistic project with overarching academic and co-curricular learning outcomes** for our students. The project, which has now become a much-awaited annual event, is 6-months long, with the preparation, planning and designing phase being about 5 months, culminating into the implementation phase of a 2-day Mela/Fair in the school playground, followed by a final outcome phase of about 1 month.



Students’ display their products during the mela

Project Objectives:

The primary and secondary objectives, focused on while developing the skill-based entrepreneurial project, and how they were integrated within the tasks designed, are detailed as follows:

- **Primary Objectives:**

- To inspire the girls to believe that they too can be **economically self-reliant**.
- To increase the academic engagement of the learners, language skills focusing on **LSRW**—Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing—were deeply embedded in the project.
- To build their **communication skills**, tasks were designed to help students embark into intra and inter-class conversations.
- To develop **learners’ oral-aural skills**, they were tasked with interviewing adults at home and from the community, thereby building their journalistic interests.
- To encourage **critical thinking**, students were asked to discuss situations, interpret scenarios, and plan them where success for their project was guaranteed.
- To promote **teambuilding and collaboration**, class-wise project designing and implementation was envisaged.

- To **foster creativity**, students were motivated to **think out-of-the-box** and given continued guidance on upgrading and updating their entrepreneurial ideas.
- To **increase their attendance and attention** in class, students and parents were actively involved in the projects plans.
- **Secondary Objectives:**
 - To build their interest towards coming to school and **curbing dropout**, the project outline was designed to show **relevant earning options** for the future.
 - To develop their **economic perspective**, the project design included lessons on **money management**.
 - To bring about **transformative change** in their outlook, the girls underwent hands- on training on believing in their product and increasing its salability with proper presentation and marketing.
 - To promote their understanding of **business outcomes**, post-project discussions on **auditing and profit utilization** were of their products, and **marketing** their goods and to **make profits**.

Project Challenges and Mitigation:

Various challenges in the pre, during and post-implementation phases of the project did crop up to hinder the natural flow of the plans. However, mitigation of the problems through innovative solutioning led to transformative change from constraints to resources.

Parents' consent to their wards being part of a project not directly related to the syllabus, was difficult to get. Convincing parents to the outcomes being envisioned and outlining the objectives was productive.

Anticipating reluctance from parents to provide the initial costs of raw materials, it was announced during the first **Parent-Teacher Meeting (PTM)** that the school would do so. Getting students to **attend regular meetings and discussions** was a big challenge. With parents on board and agreeable, they were ready to send the students to school.

Resource constraint was a major challenge, with paucity of funds at the school end being a major challenge. Class-wise distribution of small **initial capital** helped overcome the constraint.

Getting the School Managing Committee on board was done by outlining the benefits of the project in a MC meeting.

Allotting time for the project in the school's busy schedule was managed with careful planning, by engaging students during breaks and off-periods.

Teacher engagement was created by presenting a detailed outline of learning outcomes to be derived from the project.

Students' participation was confirmed by presenting the project outline in a engaging and entertaining way, making it a fun learning opportunity.

Project Outline:

The initiation into the project started with the first meeting with the students where the basics of the project were outlined. Students were told that they were to make products for which the school would provide the **initial capital**, and a Mela would be organized for them to showcase their products and sell them. Students were given the task of coming up with ideas on how they will think up what to sell, create products of their own, decide on the pricing, market their product and finally sell it to customers during the "Janakalyan Shilpudyog Mela" which was to take place in their own school playground. They were

informed that they would receive **continuous support and hand-holding** from me and all the teachers so that they can rethink their ideas for greater success.

Then, meetings with parents—PTMs--were organized to get the parents on board, followed by meetings with the School Managing Committee to approve the project.

Next came the big day where students (class-wise) along with their class teachers received their first 'initial Capital' with which they would buy the raw materials for the project. The capital was provided from the school funds and students along with their class teachers signed **contract papers** confirming that they would return the initial capital after project completion. Students were informed that each class would keep their own profit amount after returning the school's investment. The excitement was palpable among students on that day as they got inducted into the project through such a novel event.

Here is the break-up of class-wise initial capital invested from the school funds:

Class V—Rs. 300/- Class VI—Rs. 300/- Class VII—Rs. 400/- Class VIII—Rs. 500/- Class IX—Rs. 500/- Class XI—Rs. 1000/-



Signing of Contract Papers

Receiving their first 'Initial Capital'

Our little entrepreneurs then went through a phase of **discussions, deliberations and brainstorming** among the classmates and with their teachers. Soon they came up with ideas which got perfected over time. Rapid increase in attendance and attention in class was being observed. Communication increased and so did engagement in classroom interactions. Over the months, along with their academic pursuits, students actively started participating in the project created for them. With products pouring in, teachers were busy in helping students make their items even more attractive.

Soon it was time for the **2-day Mela** at the school playground where stalls were set up and decorated by students, each class vying for attention from the customers with their beautiful displays. **Marketing skills** were developed when each stall contended for customers by showcasing their products through their **sales pitch**....it was fun to watch the **competitive spirit** among the students. **Student reporters interviewed customers and salesman**, writing elaborate **reports or video filming** the mela. Students organized group **folk songs and dance** performances to engage the audience and enliven the atmosphere in a **festive spirit**.

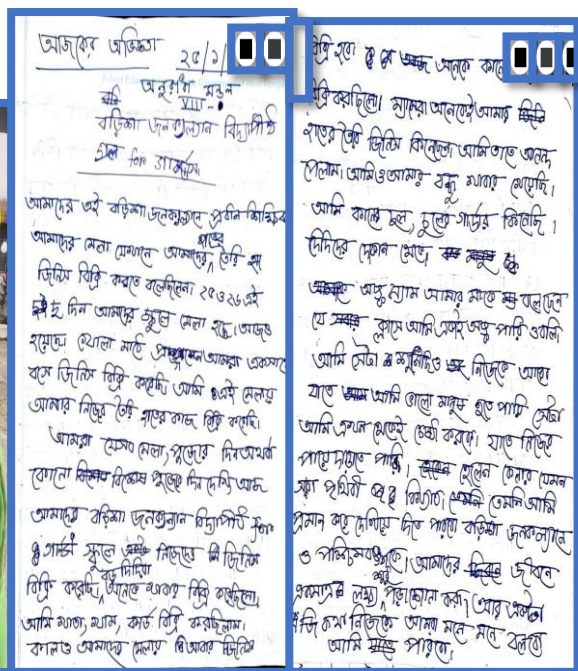
The next phase involved sets of meetings among students, their class teachers and me, to learn to finalize their **sales figures**, make **audited accounts**, determine actual amount of **profit** after **accounting for losses**, and ascertaining how to distribute the profit amount among the whole class. The students happily returned the initial capital shared by the school, thereby proving that each class was able to sell their products and make profits.



The wonderful

✚ Project Outcomes:

- **Student Attendance and Attention Increased:** Dramatic improvement in the overall attendance of the students was the outcome we teachers welcomed. The post-pandemic blues were replaced with enthusiasm for school activities and both participation and attention in classroom activities improved considerably.
- **21st Century Skill Development:** The 4 C's—**Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration and Creativity** were inculcated and promoted among the learners throughout the project and the various tasks they performed honed their skills to perfection.
- **Student Reporting-Communication Improvement:** The best reporting of our Mela was by our student reporter Anuradha Mondal of class VIII. Achieving writing skill development through participatory activity-based learning was an important aspect of our endeavour.



Best Reporter Award to Anuradha

Anuradha's Report in Bengali

LSRW Skills Promoted:

- **Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills** of learners were perfected throughout the various stages of the project. Languages, such as **Bengali, Hindi and English** were employed by students to communicate with their customers as well as amongst themselves.



The Mela Grounds

Audit and Accounting Skills:

Audit and accounting followed by performance appraisals and prize distribution for the Entrepreneurship Project "Janakalyan Shilpudyog Mela" was a grand event for the school. With all participating students attending, they learnt how important **stock-taking and critical analysis** is to any project. Analysing the outcomes to ascertain the **successes and failures** is important for **future planning and**

effective execution the next time.



Audit and Accounting in progress



Best Salesperson Award

Inspiration through Media Updates:

Millennium Post's report on our initiative:

<https://www.millenniumpost.in/kolkata/school-takes-step-to-make-its-students-financially-self-reliant-506537?infinite-scroll=1>



The school authorities have provided a token amount to the students of each class – from class V till XI and then have hand held them to make various handmade items.

With the consent of the guardians and the managing committee, they have been made to sign a contract paper on November 16 last year, that the token amount that has been provided to them will be returned back to the school authorities through the sale proceeds of the handmade items.

A series of meetings were held with guardians and managing committee since July who gave the school authorities the nod for taking the idea forward. "We are organising a two-day Janakalyan Silpa Udyog Mela at our own school

tract, they will have to return the amount provided to them through the sale proceeds and the extra money will go in their own pockets," a senior teacher of the school said.

Majority of the 250 odd students of the school are first generation learners. "After COVID-19 pandemic, we had witnessed lack of enthusiasm among them. We realised that for retention of these girls in school, we need to do something innovative to boost their confidence level. In July, last year we came out with an idea of making them self-reliant and at the same time inculcate a business mindset which will be a big morale booster for them and at the same time revive their interest in studies," Sharmila Sengupta, headmistress of the school said.

A local Youtube channel's report for the local community:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkMZ3rEKWJk>

Motivation through Awards and Sustainability:

Certificates and prizes were awarded in different categories to all the best performers, with the categories being:

Best Team Effort
Best Profit Margin
Best Reporting

Best Marketing Team
Best Innovative Idea
Cleanliness Award

Best Salesperson
Best Display
Best Stall



Awards and Certification - Happy faces of proud entrepreneurs!

Three cheers to all our teachers who did a great job of teaching, supporting, monitoring and encouraging the students.

Janakalyan Shilpudyog Mela is superhit! We keep making it a success each year!