

KANTILAL B. DONGA

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learning opportunities, if they are not to stagnate"*

I was a pupil of the well-known educationist and administrator of Saurashtra, Shri Dholarraji Mankad. He influenced me greatly. The institutions in which I studied, Gopaldas Maha Vidyalaya and Aliyapada Adhyapan Mandir at Dhoraji, inspired me to become a good teacher. The Gondal area of Saurashtra had a tradition of compulsory education when it was under princely rule. The former ruler of Gondal state, Shri Bhagvatsinhji, was a far-sighted ruler. I have great admiration for his educational administrative acumen. The literacy levels in this area were reasonably good when we undertook the literacy mission in our village.

My main educational goals have been the following:

- Improvement of the physical environment of the school.
- Children-run children's shop (self management).
- Publication of compilations by children.
- Developing creativity in children.
- Instruction in the *Ramayan* and the *Gita*.
- Teachers' credit cooperative in school.

When I started working in my present school I found the conditions very unsanitary. People used to use the land attached to the school as an open-air toilet and a rubbish dump. I tried to reason with them not to do so, but my words did not have much effect. I then decided to let the people use the land as a rubbish dump, but made it a point to clean the area myself everyday. Soon my students and fellow teachers joined in this regular cleaning drive. The people in the village were shocked and stopped using the school land as a place for rubbish. However, the practice of students cleaning the school compound everyday continues even today. I believe that the physical environment in which children study and play should be clean and teachers should ensure such an environment.

Children's shop

The children's-shop scheme was introduced around 20 years ago. This initiative had three objectives:

1. To provide the children with a learning experience based on small business transactions.
2. To provide a facility for children, managed by the children themselves, as well as to develop in the children a sense of pride.
3. To raise small amounts of money for welfare activities.

The students manage the shop with some guidance from their teachers. We keep costs to the minimum possible. For instance, one of our teachers who is visually handicapped, suggested that he could buy the stocks for the shop from the town since he did not have to pay bus fares. The shop initiative has been very successful. The children enjoy running it and the school gets some money every year for children's welfare activities.

Learning through writing and visits

We also collect paper which is not being used and encourage children to write articles. The topics covered have included literature, interesting facts, things children should know, short comic stories. Usually the matter is compiled from various sources, though sometimes original matter does appear. The output is brought out under the children's names. One particularly good compilation was a collection of various photographs of Indira Gandhi which was brought out when she died. This collection had some very rare pictures. Initiatives like these bring out the children's creativity and also make parallel learning possible.

We take our students for visits to good educational institutions, cooperatives and *panchayati* so that they are exposed to the working of these institutions. Another experiment I carried out involved selecting passages from scriptures like the *Ramayan* and the *Gita* and instructing the children in the morals such scriptures teach us.

Television is a recent development. Many children watch TV regularly nowadays. I was intrigued by their behaviour and asked them, "What do you see most on TV?" They told me film songs. I found that children imbibe a lot from the fantasies that are presented in the songs. I think that TV has its strengths from the point of view of education. But the misuse to which it is put needs to be controlled. I explained to the students that the behaviour one sees on TV is far removed from what happens in daily life. Some of the students realised this point.

Resource mobilization

I must have collected about Rs. 400,000 for my school from various donors. In addition, I maintain a school fund to which the following contribute: children's shop, parents when they enroll their children in school for the first time, former students and students who leave school on completion of their primary schooling.

Initially I did not get much support from the community. So I decided to work with individuals who could directly contribute to the school. For instance, I got desks made by our village artisan. I explained to him that he had to contribute some of his labour free to the school. He agreed. He had the satisfaction of doing something worthwhile for the school and I had the desks made at a low cost. I believe that even in an economically backward area like the one where I live, one can raise resources for the school provided one's commitment to the school and to the children is obvious. Many of the parents of the students are labourers. The most satisfying moments for me are when they present me with small amounts of Rs. 20 to Rs. 50 as their contribution for my labour. Slowly I

roped in other members of the community into raising funds for improving the assets of the school. We now have a tape recorder, radio, physical training equipment like dumbbells, and musical instruments like harmonium, all mobilised from the community. I believe that for children from economically poor backgrounds, such additions have a far greater meaning in terms of quality of education. We also have an intercom system in each class which was set up by one of our former students. The water tank and lights have been contributed by our former students.

Networking with the village community and high school

My relationship with the village community may seem paradoxical. My personal belief is that there are more disadvantages than advantages in *panchayat* administration of primary education. At the same time, we have a functioning village education committee, comprising *panchayat* members. The committee takes part in school development activities. We involve *panchayat* members in mid- day meal scheme review meetings and in the pay-centre school meetings. The electricity bills of the school are paid by the *panchayat*. If the teachers think that a particular television programme is of educational importance, arrangements are made in the school compound for everyone to sit and watch the programme. What has possibly helped in maintaining good relationships with the *panchayat* is my principle of not gossiping about school matters in the village and not bringing village politics into the school.

I have also established good links with the high school teachers and the boys' school in the village. We share laboratory equipment and sometimes we organise science experiments in the high school.

Involving colleagues

I received the state best-teacher award in 1984. However, the credit should go to all my fellow teachers. I have always believed in developing positive peer relationships. A peacock can look graceful only if it has feathers. I have also instituted the practice of encouraging my teachers to involve themselves in improvement of the schools attached to our pay centre. One of our teachers has undertaken to repair the boys' school. Also all teachers do not take up such activities at the same time. We take turns. This year (1995) we have selected two schools under an infrastructure improvement project. We have already persuaded a well-off doctor to contribute to one of the schools. We visit our associated schools regularly, interact with the teachers and try to solve their problems collectively. Such activities help me to train the junior teachers also. I hope they will continue the tradition. I also tell my teachers that if a *roti* which is being cooked is not moved around, it will burn. Likewise, teachers should constantly upgrade themselves by looking for learning opportunities, if they are not to stagnate. The education system also needs to be under constant scrutiny so that changes can be made at the appropriate time.

As an active member of the teachers' federation I have been involved in the study circles set up for teacher development. We are also working towards the establishment of a research centre for primary education. This should be ready in another two years. Such a

centre should provide small research grants to good teachers because till now what we have seen in primary education are many experiments. Some of these have been short-term in nature. What we need to know are the effects of such interventions. Information exchange is another area for improvement and use of audio-visual educational aids should also be promoted.

After retirement I plan to start a private primary school in the village. I have already registered a trust called the *Mahadav Vidyalaya Trust*. I hope to continue some of the good practices which I have been following. I believe in steady and well thought out work. Only the light shed by consistent action will dispel darkness.