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"My approach to education focuses on the dreams of the child"

My parents spent their whole lives in primary education. When I was a child I used to go with my father to his classes and help him. During this time I imbibed certain principles like punctuality, no personal work during duty time, and doing full justice to work with children. I always considered myself a student. If I can learn something from anyone, I will make the effort to do so. Though I started teaching in 1967, I continued to study. I did my masters in Gujarati. I became interested in the poetry of the *Ravibhan sampradaya*. Being of a spiritual nature myself, I felt that a study of this poetry would help me personally as well as professionally. I therefore did my doctoral-studies on the lives (*jeevan*) and creations (*kavan*) of eight poets. I also studied these aspects in the context of the religious atmosphere of the medieval ages. The programme of study has helped me in teaching the Gujarati language with more ease, even at the first standard level. My colleagues have appreciated my work and I have been motivated by their willingness to learn from me.

My approach to education focuses on the dreams of the child. The child is a tender creeper which needs caring and nurturing. Understanding the child is important so that the teacher can help the child develop. However, the child learns by copying, and a child's development reflects the patterns of the elders. It is, therefore, necessary that the teachers are seen as moral beings worth following. There is no point in blaming the child. The parents are equally responsible for the child's development. When there are good models at school and at home the child is not confused. When the home model and the school model conflict, the child picks up the home influences easily and the teacher is blamed.

I believe in sitting with the children and talking to them so that I can get their own views of their psychological, economic, physical and family backgrounds. This helps me in moulding the teaching according to the children's needs and interests. This is especially important since the area where I work is a backward area and the parents are not in a position to pay proper attention to their children. Even in matters of enrolment, I have to visit the homes of parents regularly.

After a day's work if a teacher feels that he or she has really done something good for the children that day, that is reward enough. When a teacher is recognised for the work put in, it can be an additional reward. In one of the woman teacher camps, I presented a talk on 'illiteracy and the role of women teachers' which was much appreciated. I also spoke about six villages in the taluka which were still illiterate. The government took notice and a literacy evaluation committee visited the villages where I had worked. I have also written some poems on good teachers. These have not been published.

I have been a primary teacher for more than 25 years. I have seen a lot of deterioration in the education sector, and this sometimes creates in me a feeling of frustration. There is a

lot of talk about reforming the primary education sector. But the general situation is such that even good teachers find it difficult to maintain their motivation in the face of a persistent lack of facilities. Ultimately, however, the teacher has to depend on chalk and blackboard, and for the time being we have to work within the constraints. For instance, the government stopped a small grant of Rs. 20 which was being given for the maintenance of the school building. At a meeting of the teachers we raised some funds and hired staff to clean the school and to make drinking water arrangements.

I have trained my staff members to be child centred. Even if I am not present, the school's work goes on. The feeling that I try to develop is that 'we should live and work together like members of one family'.

We often help students organise entertainment and cultural programmes in the school. We invite higher officials and leading citizens of our village to such functions. The occasions also serve as fund raising opportunities. The money so collected goes towards improvement of the physical facilities of our school. We also keep small funds for repairing furniture and similar equipment. We have also purchased a clock, many educational aids, fans and other items for the school.