

# Meeting Minutes of the Teachers Workshop

**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 2021

**Venue:** The Hotel Panache

**CBPS Attendees:** Jyotsna Jha, Neha Ghatak, Syed Mazahir Husain, Achala S Yareseeme, Ranjeeta Sinha, Dheeraj Kumar

## 1. Jyotsna's introduction

Jyotsna started the workshop by providing a brief introduction to the Bihar Mentorship Model emphasising the focus on 'critical thinking skills, self and contextual exploration based learning, initiatives of community mapping and how it played an essential role especially during the pandemic, having local mentors from the state, continuous training and support on content and pedagogy, continuous feedback loop (daily notes, phone call notes around key questions) with the mentors, attendance monitoring, mapping of BMP curricular and regular curricular focus, teacher orientation sessions and surveys to monitor progress in change in behaviour.

She also spoke about the unexpected turn of events due to the Covid-19 pandemic and hence, to continue the learning efforts how we initiated the 'Learning through Letters' intervention.

## 2. Learning through letters intervention

Jyotsna spoke about the initiative in detail, explaining how it is a biweekly postal material written in a letter form, but containing learning activities that we developed for reaching our children in ten schools in Patna and Muzaffarpur where our action research project has been operational.

She went on to describe the process of how the letters were developed and designed to be a conversational and personal style to have a relationship with the child, with short and precise instructions, usage of questions to engage the children, scaffolding and sequencing of resources (repetitions), creating an element of waiting' in the answers. She also mentioned how there were diverse methods for exploration (small experiments using easily available materials in rural homes; conversation with family members /neighbors of all ages/ observation), how they were contextually rooted while discussing various issues of science, social science, issues of equity, diversity and gender. She also mentioned how we used simple language and images to make it appealing to the children. She also mentioned how we sent one packet of notebooks, colours, and books in a span of four months.

She discussed some of the main findings from our telephonic surveys conducted during this time. She mentioned some of the major findings which are summarised below:

- An overwhelming majority of children (almost 90%) don't access online/TV education
- Children are engaged in greater chores / care work / labour / roaming around in groups, at least half of them have no textbooks for the class – either new or old.
- Teachers have very limited means or training in dealing with the situation where schools are closed for teaching, and children are confined to home.
- Some teachers are making some efforts, but they need more support.

Hence, she went on to describe the need for a Toolkit for Education in Emergency (Specific to Bihar with potential for adaptation elsewhere) and its necessity.

She described the process of how this toolkit would be implemented – that there would be discussion with the stakeholders, and use the one-day workshop to create the basis for a longer five-day online module and based on how it goes. She concluded her speech and invited the Additional Chief Secretary to come and speak and share his comments and insights.

### 3. Address by Sanjay Kumar – Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Education, Government of Bihar

Shri Sanjay Kumar started his speech by saying that he was happy to participate in this event and initiated the discussion on the notion of an extended emergency that is ongoing and has been a precursor towards learning losses incurred by school going children. Then he spoke about the National Achievement Survey conducted for classes 3,5 and 8 by the NCERT in 2017 has already indicated towards similar problems of learning loss. He also said that during the pandemic, the Government tried to reach out to children in the form of televised programs on Doordarshan, however, due to inaccessibility of TVs to children, the reach of these programs has been limited. Confirming this, he also mentioned a report by Dreze. He indicated the issue of equity in distribution of devices and said, “How do you access?”, “Who will get access?”, “Who will remain connected?”, these were some of the questions he raised. He also mentioned that there are efforts towards making children digitally empowered by providing them with digital devices.

In this regard, he appreciated the efforts of Government of Bihar in devising programs under the “Uñnayan Bihar” scheme. He then expressed his concerns about access to and availability of text books. His main concern was drawn from Government data of class 1 to 8 which indicated that only 6% of the students have bought any new books, 5% were using old books, 11% may have the full set of books, with a combination of old and new books and 79% do not have any books He

also mentioned how, in 2005, learning outcomes was better than the national average, however, by 2015, there was a steep decline. He connected the decline in learning outcomes to education expansion through Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and evoked the long-standing debate on quality over quantity. He also mentioned that he would like CBPS to offer technical support in order to understand learning outcomes better. He thanked CBPS for organising this session and said that he is looking forward to an active partnership with CBPS.

After concluding his speech, Jyotsna thanked him and responded to some of the points made by ACS. She said that the state and civil society need to be alert in order to understand the consequences of private school expansion. She also said that use and access are two different things and our data has clearly shown that even when technological devices like TV or phone is available at the household, the access to these devices remains limited, especially for girls. In terms of learning outcome, she said that large scale surveys conducted on learning outcomes in India have often taken a very minimalist approach which does not take into account different ways in which children learn. She spoke about how CBPS could facilitate the process of devising mechanisms to study and understand the process of learning which also captures unstructured processes through which children learn.

She then invited the Chief Secretary to come and give the inaugural address.

#### 4. Address by Tripurari Sharan – Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar

Mr Tripurari Sharan started with a story from his childhood speaking about the infrastructure facilities in school, and about how the infrastructure facilities had improved in the last 50 years in the state. Using international examples, he mentioned that it was very important to understand the link between education and development which most of the people do not understand. Then he started talking about the quality and how we can improve it. He told us that the issue of quality is very critical to gauge the pulse. However, he questioned if we have the necessary mentoring and monitoring systems in place to do this. He then expressed an urgency in launching 100 of experiments like the mentorship initiative of CBPS. These kinds of efforts are guiding lights and would encourage other initiatives of such kind. He spoke about islands of prosperity in Bihar and gave examples of cases where children from far off places, rural areas have done significantly well in terms of educational attainments. But these cases remain as outliers. In the end he spoke about the criticality of elementary education. Jyotsna agreed with all his points and spoke about the importance of ethos for change.

## 5. Smt. Kiran Kumari, State Programme Officer, Quality (Pedagogy), Bihar Education Project Council

Smt. Kiran Kumari spoke about the conditions in Bihar, and how in Bihar due to floods and dearth of teachers (from various reasons such as that of duty in elections), the public education system is riddled with issues similar to an emergency situation almost all the time. She asked teachers present for the training to create sustainable bonding with the children, so that they are able to understand their needs. She also shared concerns on the issue of access to digital technologies by school children. In her concluding remarks she was appreciative of the organising of the workshop for teachers and in the end, she thanked CBPS for such a comprehensive and quality research.

## 6. Technical Session 1

### 6.1 Role Play 1

The technical session started with Jyotsna and Neha conducting a role play related to the postcard initiative. The act was how the child was trying to read the LtL diary and the mother calls her to work instead of dreaming of going to school or becoming a big officer by trying to read the diary. The mother also points out how they are dependent on livestock for their earnings and that she would have to go and give it food.

In the discussion that ensued, it was clear that teachers were able to understand that these are the realities of rural areas that the teachers have to understand as they affect the dreams of the children. Mr. Syed Moin, Representative from UNICEF joined in and expressed his views on the need for a girl to be educated. He also said that the mother understands that the girl can have dreams, but that there is no point to these dreams when the realities are different. He also mentioned that the quality of education is important for both boys and girls, and in some places, it has become worse for boys as they have to support their families.

### 6.2 Role Play 2

The second role play focused on the learning losses that the children were experiencing due to missing school due to Covid-19. It depicted a girl whose brother had no time to help her and he himself may also have forgotten how to read. The girl also expresses despair and thinks of giving her books away to her younger brother as she sees no more utility of it. It showcased the reality of students riddled with frustration and helplessness.

During the discussion ensuing from the role play 2, a teacher explained how the girl has incurred learning losses due to Covid – 19. He also explained how it becomes a grave limitation for a girl with a rural background who has not received any books for the class that she is in and coupled with continuous closure of schools is at a disadvantage. He also explained that how if someone in the family could have had

been literate, it would have had different results than what appeared in the role play as the child seems to be a first generation to get education. This also prompted other discussion on whether Covid-19 was the first emergency that they might have encountered. Teachers and participants pointed out that even in normal times, food and rations have started to become scarce.

### 6.3 Role play 3

In the third role play, Jyotsna was essaying the role of a boy who is working in a farm, clearing the grass and thinking about school. He is thinking about what he would be doing if the school was open, how he would have got eggs today during the mid-day meal and they would have got to do fun activities as Dheeraj Bhaiya would come to school. He also thinks about his teachers and wonder if he will ever go back to school. He now has the burden of managing the house too as his Father came back from the city and has no work also to do.

The audience was asked to describe what happened during the act and what they understood from it. The discussion revolved around real concerns that teachers had that children may never come back to schools, and the role of teachers in encouraging children to come back to schools. After the rich discussion, Jyotsna concluded the session emphasising on the importance of building a unique and positive relationship with the children. She explained to the teachers that transparency is a very important indicator to deepen the relationship between the teacher and the student.

### 6.4 Post-it task:

Right after the first technical session, was a task with 'Post Its' for all the teachers present. The teachers were asked to write in one or a few words, their experience of the Covid-19 pandemic within 20 seconds of time. The underlying idea was that the teachers would present their most significant/prominent memories or experiences of the pandemic when such a short span of time is all they have to respond to the question. The following are the wide range of responses that were received from the teachers who participated in this workshop: Relief from domestic work and office work, times filled with tension, fear and panic, a very difficult situation to face, stressful lives, economic disruption and helplessness.

## 7. Technical Session 2

Jyotsna initiated the session by explaining to the participants how the emergency induced fear especially amongst children. She asked the teachers to reflect upon themselves and let the workshop participants know about any incident where the teachers have faced similar fears. In response to this, many teachers spoke about their own experiences of fear and how they were able to cope with the fear and trauma. This prompted a discussion on how teachers can enable children to cope with the severe stress that children must be experiencing, but not necessarily expressing. Issues such as marginalisation (of caste, class, and religion) were also

brought up in this context. The session concluded with lunch and the group reassembled for session 3 after lunch.

### 8. Technical Session 3

Jyotsna imitated the discussion and the emphasised on the importance of review. She explained how book reviews can be a very important pedagogical tool for a teacher and that it is as important do reviews as it is to teach. So, she started the process of dividing the teachers into groups and assigning them the themes based on the postcards of LtL. Once this was done, the groups were asked to discuss and analyse the postcards, and write up the analyses on chart papers that would then be stuck on the room. There were some questions that were used as prompts for teachers to prepare their points such as: how does this tool help in relationship building, how does it help in sustaining interest of the children, how does it use limited resources at home, and how does it facilitate diverse means of expression for the children?

After this exercise, Jyotsna spoke about how the cards can be used in many ways to enhance the critical thinking and learning abilities of the children. Neha also discussed the ERAC principles **E- Experience, R- Reflection, A- Action, C- Consolidation** and how the process of learning remains the same, offline or online – interaction in classroom, through observation, dialogue and exploration through unstructured experiences. She also discussed about certain non-negotiables for Education in Emergency such as the importance of relationship building, learning losses of foundational skills, importance of peer-learning etc. After the presentation of all the groups and the discussion related to each of the themes, we ended the day with the closing ceremony.

### 9. Closing ceremony

Neha provided an introduction to the online course that would be held subsequent to the one-day training. She provided an orientation for the registration of the workshop, and gave them information on how they could register and complete the course. After this was done, Jyotsna invited Dr Binodanand Jha to speak at the event.

### 10. Closing remarks by Dr. Binodanand Jha, Director Research & Training, Department of Education, Government of Bihar

Dr. BinodAnand Jha initiated the discussion on the issue of equity and how it increases the gap on the basis of classes and caste. He was appreciative of methods like that of sending letters/postcards when the children did not even have access to books. He was motivating the audience to continue strive towards making the lives of children in the schools better. He also guided the teachers to encourage children to dream. He recognised the importance of postcards citing the in-depth discussions that they initiate on various subjects like English, Maths and Science. He also

mentioned that it is very important work and that the Government schools must learn from these experiments which have been effective. Concluding his address, he also said that there is a scope for a lot of work to be taken up in the future and also mentioned how Jyotsna's training has helped in this regard.

After this, Jyotsna invited Moinji to also give his comments about the session.

Moinji spoke about the entire proceedings of the day and also said how the day was full of learning and thanked the CBPS team for it. After this, we had the vote of thanks and concluded the session.