

REPORT ON ONLINE AND TELEPHONIC CLASSES OF SLUM CHILDREN OF GREATER NOIDA

Abstract : As an extension of in-person teaching sessions undertaken by me, I taught students virtually during the coronavirus pandemic to ensure that students do not miss out on their education due to their schools being non-instructional due to the nationwide lockdown.

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1. Concept Note :

The Legal Aid Centre of Symbiosis Law School, NOIDA conducts various awareness programmes to sensitize the society towards a plethora of issues of social importance. As an extension of such initiatives we, students of the college and Para Legal Volunteers at the Legal Aid Centre are conscious of the privilege we enjoy and the power it gives us to help others. In pursuance of the same, along with many other volunteers of the Robin Hood Army, Greater NOIDA chapter, we have been taking virtual classes of children living in various slums of Greater NOIDA such as Aichchar Village, Kasna and slums behind Gautam Buddha Nagar University.

One visit to these slums is truly eye opening. A few metres beyond the sprawling campus of the impressively built Gautam Buddha University, lie hundreds of *jhuggis* belonging to the persons who toiled for months and built it with their own hands. These two places seem like two completely different worlds. One an epitome of modernity and prosperity, a place that hundreds of students occupy as they set out on their quest for knowledge and the other where there is no bigger quest than survival.

As one arrives, inquisitive, doe-eyed children come running and greet everyone with their excited yet polite greetings. They all yell "Good evening, ma'am!" and "Good evening, sir!" in unison as if they were meeting their closest friends after a very long time. Most of these children, thanks to the **Economically Weaker Section** (hereinafter referred to as EWS) reservation scheme of the **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009** (hereinafter referred to as the Act) study in reputed private schools and as beneficiaries of the said scheme, get uniforms and books for free. As per the said scheme, 25% seats in Class I and 10% seats from classes II to VIII in private schools have to be reserved for students belonging to the Economically Weaker Sections of the society. The students who get to enjoy the benefits of the scheme are chosen through a lottery system. The ones who miss out on seats due to the lottery system, attend government schools.

Due to the nationwide lockdown imposed by the government after the corona virus outbreak, these children have been missing out on classes and thereby missing out on the limited knowledge gaining resources that they possess.

Therefore, engaging with them in order to ensure that their knowledge does not become stagnant, is the need of the hour today.

2. Objectives :

With the next generation being the torchbearers of tomorrow, it is imperative that children do not lose touch with education and continue to gain knowledge. The target audience of this project is therefore, children belonging to the age group of 5-12 years.

With almost all children attending either private or government schools, a rather peculiar issue arises. These children reach schools and are placed in classes appropriate to their ages. For example, a 6 year old with no formal education is placed in Class I alongside children who have attended school from entry level classes such as Kindergarten or Play Group. Bridging this gap between the levels of knowledge becomes a real task. For a beneficiary of the EWS scheme, the most basic things become a struggle and on top of that comes the pressure of being 'different' and lagging behind in class.

In order to bridge this gap and promote holistic development in underprivileged children, we along with other volunteers of the Robin Hood Army, Greater NOIDA chapter visit such slums and interact with and educate all these children. We focus not just on academics but also in enhancing their proficiency in Hindi and English, inculcating in them consciousness towards societal issues, playing games so that not only can they stand on equal footing with their peers but also to make them curious young minds of today that will become empowered and open minds of tomorrow.

One more objective that these sessions fulfil is that for children growing up in such penury and difficult circumstances, these interactions are a source of solace. During the conduct of these sessions, the children are happy, excited and brimming with curiosity and hope for a better future. For a few hours, they forget their tribulations and enjoy the activities we conduct.

With the imposition of the nationwide lockdown, the continuity of such sessions got broken and the children started to miss out on academics and overall personality development. Therefore, we decided to start taking up classes on video calls and in case the guardians of the child do not have smart phones, then telephonically.

3. Preliminary Preparations :

Before undertaking mobile sessions, certain preparations were made :

- a.) Salvaging contact numbers and actually being able to get in touch with children was a real task and took a significant amount of time.
- b.) Researching and preparing a curriculum which was tailor made to fit the specific needs of each child as per their level of pre-existing knowledge and their ability to withhold information.
- c.) Brainstorming and coming up with unique and interesting strategies so that children take interest and sit through the entire session attentively, keeping in mind the fact that conducting virtual sessions comes along with the risk of a child getting distracted, losing interest or simply listening and not gaining anything.
- d.) Dividing slums and students among the pool of volunteers so that each child can get focused attention and quality learning sessions.

4. Conducting the programme :

Due to the covid-19 outbreak, efforts to engage with some children had been rendered impossible due to certain slums being marked as red-zones and being sealed off completely. The ones that we were able to successfully get in touch with, are being taught with a student-teacher ratio of 1:1 as a way to minimise distractions and maximise learning.

All teachers are putting interesting strategies to use to ensure that the student does not lose interest. The strategy that we devised is simple – we ask the student we are teaching for their favourite things and keep sharing information about the same and learning the spellings along the way. For example :

Q. "What is your favourite animal?"

A. "Rabbit"

Q. "What does a rabbit eat? It eats a **carrot.**"

A. "C-A-R-R-O-T"

Q. Where does a rabbit live? It lives in the **forests**"

A. "F-O-R-E-S-T"

and so on.

This way, the student stays focused as their input is required every now and then and as the topic of study are their favourite things!

A set curriculum is being followed, tweaking it and improvising here and there keeping in mind the specific needs of each child. After a few academic discussions, there is always something creative – a little storytelling, recitation or a simple word game. The timings of sessions vary depending on each child. The younger ones generally have a short attention span and are relieved earlier. There are days when the student does not wish to study and on such occasions, after a little conversation and discussion, the student is allowed to excuse themselves.

They are regularly quizzed on the precautions they are taking in these times of coronavirus and are encouraged to continue taking necessary precautions. After every session, the child is given a little homework, which is almost always to revise what was taught and come up with questions about it for the next session. There are times when a particular volunteer fails to take a session and on such days, another volunteer fills in for them to ensure that the chain is not broken.

5. Response of the Target Audience :

All these children have one thing in common – they have a thirst for knowledge. They have a hundred questions and a thousand possible answers. On most days, they pick up our calls with delight and engage with us happily. They are keen to hear new ideas and even keener to share their own. There are also off days, no doubt. There are days when no homework is done or when they are only in the mood of activities or days when they simply do not want to study. They are excused on such days but are explained that this must not become a habit. On most days, however, they are well prepared to learn new things and interact with us .

6. Key Personal Takeaway :

Our most important takeaway from this initiative has been the acknowledgment of our own privilege. Conversations with them make us conscious of the fact that we are fighting very different battles and these classes on the phone are an escape for them, a way to regain a semblance of normalcy.

We have learned that knowledge is one of the best things to impart. Education has the power to change the world. To be able to shape the lives of all these children, one phone call at a time, is a surreal feeling.

7. Future Plan of Action :

With the lockdown rules being relaxed over time, the plan for the immediate future is to engage more and more children in the initiative. The lockdown created difficulties in arranging contact numbers and therefore, we will try to get as many contacts arranged as possible.

Ensuring the continuity of these sessions is another aspect that we will be focusing on. Quizzing students, testing them and analysing their performances is another point of focus so as to understand the impact such classes are having on the children upon which the strategies and curriculum may be improvised.

8. Conclusion and Remarks :

What seemed to be an ambitious project at first has turned out to be an invaluable exercise for the children thanks to the dedication of both the teachers and the students. In these unprecedented times, virtual is the new normal. These children deserve to continue to gain education and we are grateful that we are able to play a small part in that.

ANNEXURE



On _____ we are going
day of the week

on a picnic! I'm going with my
 _____ and my favorite
family member

pet _____. For lunch, we
animal

will eat _____ and drink
plural thing

_____. We will end the
type of drink

day with a _____ game
describing word

of _____.
activity

JUNE 2020

M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

THURSDAY MAY 14

I Jumbled Words

1. DSENSE	NESES ✓
2. EARTH	RAHTE ✓
3. MASK	KSMA ✓
4. REST	SERT ✓
5. BREATHE	
6. BEACH	HECAB x
7. COFFEE	EFFEOC ✓
8. ROUND	DRNUO ✓
9. BRING	GNRI ✓

II Complete the series

- 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23, 27, 31 ✓
- 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, 27 ✓
- 20, 16, 12, 8, 4, 0, X
- ABI, CD2, EF3, GH4, IJ5, KLG, MN7 ✓
- A2, B4, C6, D8, E10, F12, GH ✓
- AB, BC, CD, DE, EF, FG, GH ✓

III Name them -

- Two animals that live on a farm ✓
- 3 animals who lay eggs ✓
- 3 animals who hunt for their food ✓
- 5 sense organs ✓
- Hardworking animal ✓
- 2 animals that give us milk ✓
- 5 ways that trees help humans
- Gases that we inhale and exhale ✓

वसंत - SPRING
 ग्रीष्म - SUMMER
 शिशिर - WINTER
 शरद - AUTUMN
 वर्षा - MONSOON

Tuesday May 5
 Exception
 ① Odd one out ->
 A - Dog
 B - Cat
 C - Fish ✓
 D - Cow
 A - Mango
 B - Apple
 C - Banana
 D - Lady finger ✓
 ② A - Roli ✓
 B - Potato
 C - ~~Potato~~ Lady finger
 D - Tomato
 ③ A - Red
 B - Blue
 C - Green
 D - Chair ✓
 ① Doctor : Hospital :: Student : _____
 ② Bird : Nest :: Fish : _____
 A1, B2, C3, —, —, —
 ① ★★△△ ② △★★△ ③ △★★★④
 3, 7, 11, 15, —, —, —
 5, 8, 11, 14, —, —, —
 2, 4, 6, 8, —, —, —
 5, 10, 15, 20, —, —, —
 A, C, E, G, I, —, —, —
 AB, BC, CD, DE, —, —, —
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