

# A School Transformed by Teachers' Concern and Care

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A socially and emotionally conducive environment is a prerequisite to enable any kind of learning in children and to contribute to their overall development. In this article, I would like to present the experiences of the children of Kannada Boys' School (KBS), Vijayapura and the creative and positive efforts of their teachers to extend emotional support in extremely difficult situations. Criminal charges, alcoholism, death of a parent, and desertion are some of the issues faced by them, leaving deep emotional scars that need teachers to be alert so that they are able to identify and provide the emotional support required not only for academics but also for the children to grow up to be mature, independent adults.

## Children's context and background

A majority of the people of Vijayapura (earlier known as Bijapur), are dependent on agriculture. However, the lack of timely rains has resulted in their migration to other districts in search of livelihoods. People from other states who have migrated to this town in search of a livelihood are surviving on small jobs. As a result, a school near the railway station has several children coming from different parts of the city. In addition to many of them being neglected by their parents, most of them are being brought up by a single parent. From having a few hours of freedom from caring for their children to being able to utilise that time to earn a daily wage, parents have many reasons to send their children to school. It also includes the fact that children are assured of at least one meal (mid-day meal) when in school.

Already facing financial difficulties, these communities were hit hard by the pandemic. Two children from different families who attend this school lost their mothers to the COVID-19 pandemic. One child's family comprises four children studying in classes I to V. Their father, a daily-wage worker, comes back home late and drunk every night. He does not care for his children. The children are very young and need the help of someone to feed, bathe and dress them.

They come to school wearing torn and dirty clothes and without any breakfast. The scenario was worse during the pandemic as their father had no job and because the school was shut, children did not get even a single meal in a day. The other child has a preschool sister and although the father takes care of them, the child has to bring his little sister to school, and she has to stay with him in school all day.

Due to such neglect, and lack of proper care and support, children are unable to learn at school. Loss of livelihood, alcoholism and single parenting are some of the many circumstances that have a profound impact on children.

## Teachers' efforts

The school has 81 children in classes I to VII and most of the children are struggling with similar circumstances. However, three teachers at the school have found ways to tackle the situation. They are all concerned and care about the children and so they have acquainted themselves with the backgrounds of the children in their class. The three teachers - one for the *Nali-Kali* classes, one for classes IV and V and one for classes VI and VII are working round the clock as a team focusing on the learning and all-round development of the children. As a first step, where job losses and deaths have resulted in poverty, the teachers organised rations for the families.

They also took steps to bring about some changes in the school and in the ways that children were being taught. As an example, there are two children from a family. While one of them is studying in class III, the other is a 4-year-old who is being cared for by the school staff during this time. Although one is able to appreciate the fact that this family is sending their children to school regularly, sending both children does present a problem. In another case, two children who had lost their mothers were coming to school without even having their breakfast. They were unkempt and lacked a sense of school discipline. The older children were given the responsibility of combing and oiling their hair,

with the oil, comb and mirror being provided by the teachers. The uniform provided by the school helped as the children did not have proper clothes. Despite all their personal problems, children in the current year have been able to successfully achieve the learning outcomes of the previous two classes because of the constant encouragement from the teachers. As every individual child is being taught through the 'to each according to their ability' method, an observation is that most of the children in the class are becoming fast learners. And since these three teachers are aware of the refurbished learning outcomes, complementary practices, such as the teaching protocol, can be observed in their classroom processes. Teachers also prepare and use TLMs for effective learning (Figures 1-3).

#### Ensuring emotional support

Three children who had lost their mothers and were studying in the *Nali-Kali* class would, in the beginning, dissolve into tears remembering their mother if the teachers said something harsh to them related to their learning. Therefore, the teachers took great care to be gentle with them, give them personal attention and show concern. From parents not being able to afford books to children not being able to take care of their things, the situation has been very trying for the teachers as well but they have ensured a supportive atmosphere by being kind, calm, encouraging and appreciative of even the smallest achievement.

The changes and the progress achieved in learning can be attributed to the interactions that the teachers have had with the children and parents, activity-based learning, the teaching-learning process based on the learning level of each child and treating the children with respect and love.

#### Attendance and home visits

Regular attendance is very important, so if any child is absent for three consecutive days, the teacher personally calls parents and enquires about the child. This has convinced the parents that the teachers care about their children.

A meeting with parents is held every month or two where the performance of the child is discussed. If parents are absent from the meeting, home visits are made and the child's performance is discussed with parents, which makes them involved with the child's studies.

When a new child is enrolled, the teachers find out about the family background, thus helping the child to settle down and get accepted by the class.

#### Discipline

Once children enter the school campus, they are allowed to leave only after school hours. Cleanliness is maintained throughout the school. As the toilets are provided with sufficient water and are properly used by the students, they are well-maintained and kept clean. Children do not waste the food provided under the mid-day meals scheme.

#### Other approaches

All the teachers work in coordination and do not hesitate to learn from each other. They also share the classroom learning materials and resources. Understanding the purpose and importance of the programmes and facilities in the school, they ensure their proper implementation and maintenance. According to the teachers, providing meals, milk, bananas, peanut candy and eggs has elevated the levels of energy and enthusiasm in the children.

The school and the community have begun to appreciate and respect the learning achievements and changes in the children. The main reason for this is the change in their attitude of understanding the children and actively working towards bringing about an all-around development in them by creating an environment conducive to their learning. This school is an outstanding example of how the way we view, address and treat children impacts their learning.

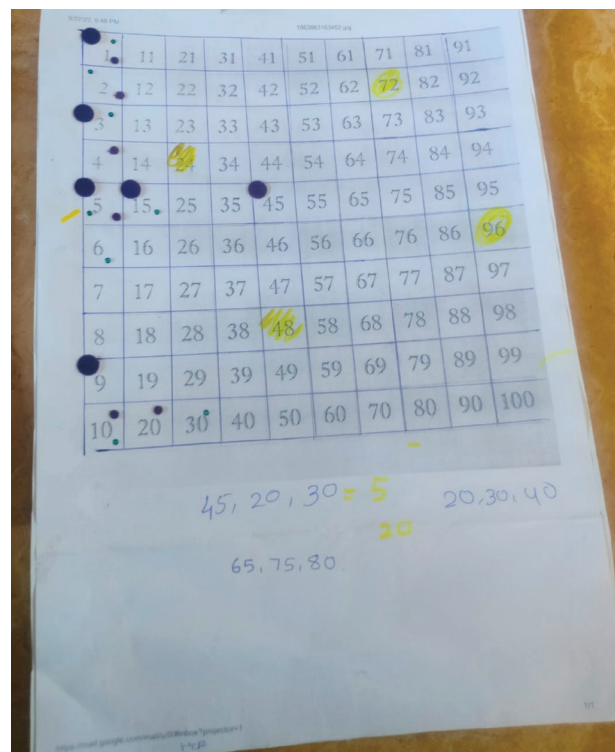


Figure 1. Representation of some specific number multipliers in 1-100 number charts.



Figure 2. Finding LCM of two numbers using a scale or number line

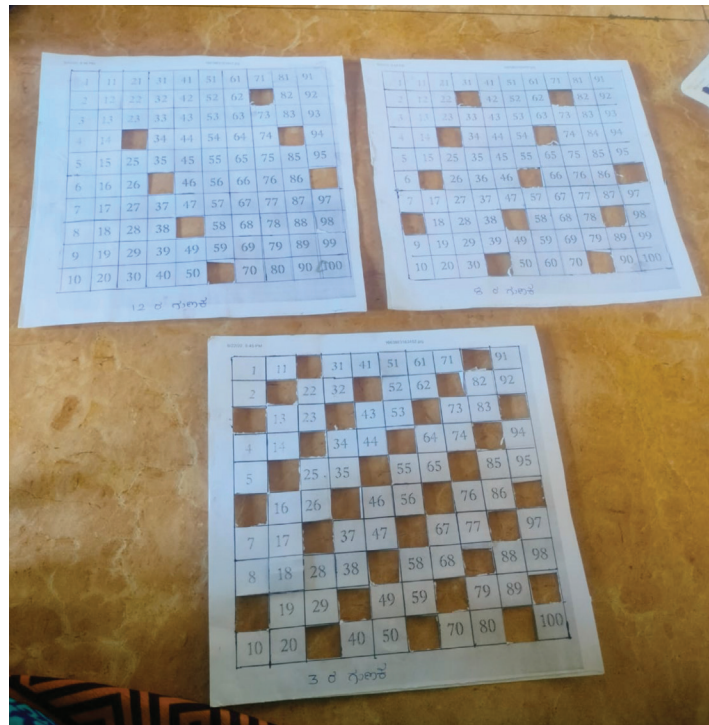


Figure 3. Representation of 3,8 and 12 number multipliers in 1-100 number charts



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