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AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH IN ELEMENTRY EDUCATION

BY

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Schools have changed over the past years, even though the alterations are not always striking or as fast in coming as some would like. Innovation is today's popular term, whereas progressivism was "yesterday's". Innovation is a change that is thought to be more efficacious in accomplishing the goals of the system (Miles, 1964). Thompson (1965) viewed innovation as the generation, acceptance and implementation of new ideas; processes, products or services. The process of innovation has been a matter of intense research and study for many years. (Anderson and King, 1993; Demeanour and Evan, 1984; Van de Ven and Rogers, 1988) In India, researches in the field of educational innovation are mainly in the development of pedagogies for enhancing motivation of teachers and children and enriching classroom learning is the phenomenon of just recent past (Chand, Shukla and Solanki, 1998; Sabharwal, 1993). In his paper, Innovations in Schools: Identifying a Framework for Initiating, sustaining and managing them, Sharma (2001) has studied four schools where innovation in the field of pedagogy is going on. Pandey (1991, 1993) was of the opinion that innovation in education is needed more at the Primary Stage.

In the current era of technology based life style basically to ease human commotion, frustration, burden, liabilities, load, and hardships there is still a field where negligence towards the advancement in teaching has caused burden over young minds especially among children in the age group of 6 - 7. Although this issue has been highlighted many a times in the committees of educational innovations with deep concern but concrete steps are lacking towards easing the children from this burden.

SAMPLE:

The school in study is Gyan Vihar School, situated at Malviya Nagar in Jaipur. The school runs under the aegis of a social organisation in the field of education, running a well known Technical Institution in the city in the name of Gyan Vihar Universe. From the date of its inception, Gyan Vihar has always taken a lead in the field of educational innovation. When most of the schools in the town are taking lead in introducing more books, the Society has thought to practise the recommendation of the various educational committees about reducing the load in Primary classes.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY:

The new concept implemented "No School Bags" is a strategy dealt with the scientific and practical aspects of teaching and learning. In this approach children do not carry heavy bags to school on daily basis. The aim of the system is to create the best learning conditions in the classroom. It allows creating a meaningful, consistent and coherent atmosphere that continues to guide the students in their all around development.

THE FEATURES:

1. Following two types of bags are maintained in the system by the students:
 - a. A big bag containing main course books and notebooks. It is sent home fortnightly i.e. on every 2nd and 4th Friday to keep the parents aware of the child's activities in the school.
 - b. The students carry small bags on daily basis. It contains a school diary, a pencil cum colour box, a lunch box and a water bottle. The students also carry textbooks and notebooks of Moral Science and G.K. in it on 1st and 3rd Tuesday.
2. No home assignment is given in the main subjects to the students. Written homework is given in G.K and Cursive Writing books of English and Hindi twice a month.
3. Learning and revision work is done in the classroom itself.
4. Continuous comprehensive evaluation is the approach followed in place of the prevailing examination system.
5. The performance and the progress of a child in academics, co-curricular and extra curricular activities is shouldered by the teachers.
6. The syllabus of the class is determined on monthly basis and the parents' stand informed.

7. Fortnightly parent-teacher meets are arranged to share the observation and feedback and discuss the performances.

8. There is a monthly bulletin, a source of recognition, and a platform for the students to express their varied views, creativity and other skills. It highlights the student's achievements in varied fields of academics and co- curricular activities and sports.

9. Work Sheet evaluation is a part of classroom activity.

10 Chart work on the bulletin board outside and inside each classroom is another activity to inspire the children to make sketches or collages on the topics currently taught and the topics, which they are expected to update with. It is an opportunity for the students to show their creativity and innate talents.

11. Physical Education is included in the daily timetable keeping in mind that 'a sound mind dwells in a sound body'. Art classes like craft; drawing, music and dance are a part and parcel of this system. A library period is allotted to enhance reading skills and reading habits among children.

CURRICULUM:

The attempt is to make curriculum meaningful for students. Embedded in the visible and invisible curriculum is the culture of the classroom. Curriculum other than the text includes highlighting the value of responsibility, respect, concern, honesty and trustworthiness. It is fluid, enduring and engaging. Textbooks are value oriented.

PROCEDURE:

The system demands emphasis on classroom teaching and learning. The teachers are trained, guided, counselled to be abreast with the new teaching strategies suitable for the system adopted. Each teacher on each subject maintains a weekly planner, she teaches in the class where in 2/3 periods in a week are for instructions; verbal interaction and the rest of the periods of the week are exclusively devoted for laying stress on the writing skills. The teachers teach in a play way method taking care of the child's psychology. The teacher - student interaction helps the teachers to test the student's pre-knowledge and judge the comprehension level and concentration of each child in groups on the current topic dealt with keeping their capacity to intake instructions at a stretch in mind. For this each period of 40minute duration is segregated into introduction, instructions and classroom activity is based on the topic explained. A brain storming session in the form of a work sheet is done after a topic is taught to enhance and evaluate the intake capacity, comprehension and learning ability. This exercise meant to observe and analyse the behavioural approach of the students towards the requisite skills, followed by a thorough exercise on writing skill through a class work based on the chapter i.e. subjective and objective types of questions. Teaching aids are used accordingly. Revision and tests are given timely.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT:

The classroom atmosphere is caring to establish a trustworthy relationship between teachers and students. The aim of teaching is not to feed in the right answer but the teachers are committed to support-reasoned opinion and ideas with the textual evidence. There is a deliberate attempt to value all voices and cater to the needs and expressions of the children during the classroom interaction. The classroom environment is highly personalised.

Management of the classroom involves part art, science and humour. Teacher is a cheerleader who serves to honour the good intentions of all students. Learning task is intertwined with curriculum, instructional strategies, group activities and the classroom environment, which is a must, as children want to be a part of an involving community. This leads the children to be committed to their values as they are waiting to be recognised amongst many. Great stress is laid on developing all four-language skills i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking.

The focus is to share their ideas and help them to develop their innate abilities and exploit their creativity. The teachers suspend their own assumptions to acknowledge the existence of students, their expression and their feelings. Group work is encouraged to help them learn to evaluate their work through cross checking. The classroom management is integral even towards the moral development of the students by emphasising on the use of kindly words like please, thank you, may I. Also a sense of belongingness among the children towards a healthy environment is encouraged.

THE TEACHERS:

The teachers are professionals. Their dedication spellbound influence, affection, and co-operation help to lay down the solid foundation of the children. After all it is the teachers, at the early stages of the child's schooling, under whose influence he makes his future. Again it is the teacher who can make the school system work efficiently. The success of the system adopted by the school is solely in the caring hands of the teachers.

THE PARENTS:

The role of the parents in this system has been minimised. They are however advised to stress on and improve upon the handwriting and the reading skills of their kids at home. They are advised how to develop the concentration power of their kids. They are expected to attend regular meetings with the concerned teachers in the school held twice a month (1st and 15th).

OBSERVATIONS:

1. This system has prevented the students from becoming the beasts of burden.
2. 'No home assignment' system has completely transferred the responsibility of the parents to the able shoulders of the teachers.
3. The students no longer face the situations of hue and cry, examination phobia, stress or strain. They come in a fun and frolic mood to school during examinations, as they are not aware of the term examination they are taking up. It is now a part of routine work and an easygoing task for them.
4. The teachers internalise all the means of strategies for the smooth functioning of the class with the active involvement of the children.
5. The skills taught in accordance with the system are worthwhile and rewarding in the long run.
6. There are additional benefits of learning to solve problems in collaboration with the other classmates. In-group activity students tend to have more intake capacity as the feeling of competence develops among them. It enhances teamwork, which will ultimately pay dividends in the long run.
7. Teaching is consistent in the classroom and creates the environment of learning and memorising.
8. The continuous comprehensive evaluation through nine grade system proves to be a boon as this system will give space to all the deserving ones in a category and not segregate highest marks achievers from the next highest or so. It reduces the hairline difference between good, better and the best and develops a healthy competition among the peer groups.
8. Keeping in mind the hard fact that the moral values are first imbibed in the home environment and confirmed in the school, the parents are given the responsibility of making their children learn and understand the lessons in Moral Science at home only.
9. To channelise the students towards watching useful serials based on the facts and learning at their level at home, T.V. watching will further prove to be a boon and not a curse. With this aim in mind, G.K. assignments are given as homework based on half an hour viewing of Animal Planet/ Geographical Channel on alternate days for which an advance circular is issued to parents.
10. It becomes easier for a teacher to identify and rectify any mistakes committed not only in the written work but also in the pronunciation, reading skills, phonetics and speech power in the classroom itself.

11. The atmosphere at home is relaxed, composed and tensionless for both parents and the children. Here lies the fundamental fact of the child's psychology according to which the span of comprehension and learning should only be 5 to 6 hours daily and so the school hours are enough for a child.

12. The Parent-Staff Meets are a source of interaction with the parents, which is a positive step taken towards the success of the new system of education. It helps in counselling the parents for their child's progress. The parents can even voice their opinion and their suggestions are considered with healthy spirit

13. This system leaves no space for any commotion or confusion related to the textual knowledge among the students as for them a teacher is a role model whose image is not reflected in any other person. This helps to develop more confidence and an improved relationship between the teachers and the taught.

14. The parents are guided to let the children utilise their increased leisure time in developing interest and skills in other co-curricular activities at home as it is a golden opportunity to grab.

15. The system discourages any torture physically, mentally and psychologically on the children.

16. It lays stress on enhancing the requisite skills, as substantial learning is only possible in the school environment.

17. Reading habit is encouraged at home through storybooks and other books of interest to the students.

COMPARATIVE STUDY:

1. The previous method proved children to be the beasts of burden whereas the new system discourages physical, mental and psychological exertion.

2. This system is more reliable, develops a bond and confidence between the teacher and the taught, which was not taken seriously in the past.

3. Teacher's expectations from the parents to guide their child at home became endless and the teaching became ineffective in some cases so the school rapport was also affected in the past but this is not so in the present system as they share no such responsibility now.

4. The examination system in the past developed a phobia and an atmosphere of stress and strain whereas now the examination is a part of routine work and thus in this continuous

comprehensive evaluation system grades determine the performance and progress of the children to boost the morale of each deserving one irrespective of low percentage.

5.As the parents are happy with the new system they help and support the teachers' efforts in making their children more responsible and caring by teaching them human values and sharing their experiences at home in their extended leisure time which was not possible due to hue and cry of the home work system in the past.

LIMITATIONS:

1. Too often parents receive watered down version or incomplete account of what is happening in the classroom, so they are worried about their child's academic performance and especially their achievements in the field.

2. Less time towards developing writing skills, as there is no homework, this discourages expression power among the students.

3. Students are receptive to the teachers only as children blindly follow the teachers As a result the parents even do not play their part assigned by the school in helping their child's handwriting and reading skills.

4. It is observed that students remain unfamiliar with the textbooks as they are in less contact with the books as compared to the old system wherein the students used to see, feel, develop observation skill and even play with them at home too.

5. There is an unwanted gap between the recollection of the topics dealt with previously and the current topic. So there is piled up revision work during the revision time.

6. Homework is a kind of reinforcement of what is learnt in the classroom but this system discourages homework concept.

7. Parents are not in the habit of setting the school bags as per the school timetable set for Moral Science and G.K. whenever required in the school.

CONCLUSION:

It is a great step towards the practical and constructive attribute at this age group. The system promotes better psychological environment for the children at home as they have no burden of doing forced and scheduled school work when it is time for them to play and be free in the natural environment for a longer time in touch with nature around them and deal with other aspects directly or indirectly related to them and even react freely for their enrichment. All these automatically develop their observation power and the requisite skills to help them to lead an all round developed life in future. The children confront no compromising situation at home and even in the school. It is a golden

opportunity for the parents to search talent in their children and utilise their leisure time in the most constructive way.

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