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IMPARTING AGRICULTURE SKILL EDUCATION DURING THE PANDEMIC

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‘However, they roam, the world must follow still the plougher’s team;
Thus, despite hardships, farming is the best.’

-Thirukkural-1031

‘Everything else can wait, but not Agriculture.’ Said Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru in the context of the Bengal famine of 1942 and the acute food shortage prevailing in the country during 1947.

ONGC Public School in Neravy, Karaikal is a renowned school in Union Territory of Puducherry and it is probably the only school in Puducherry which offers a series of skill subjects like Marketing, Web-Application, Taxation, Information & Communication Technology (ICT) and Agriculture to students of Secondary and Higher Secondary as a part of its curriculum under the dynamic initiative of the school correspondent Shri. K.Kannan. With much talk going on about the National Education Policy (NEP) and emphasis on imparting skill education to students at school, this has been a right initiative. NEP envisions the holistic development of youth with focus on not only improving the gross enrolment ratio but also on skill development as a determining factor to realise the objectives of Atmanirbar Bharat, the mission of Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji who asserts on Skill development as a key area of the Education System.

The way education was imparted took a twist when COVID-19 hit the world in a shocking way. Everything came to a still but then technology came to rescue in the educational sector with the advent of online classes. But to make the children get hands-on experience was something which needed innovation.

With the spark set by the school correspondent and the initiative taken by me as a teacher in Agriculture, the students of each class were divided into groups constituting 5 members each. Each group was allotted a specific crop and each student was instructed to grow five plants of the crop allotted to them in grow bags. Students learn about various crop production package given in their curriculum from seed to harvest. Students of class 9 are studying about solanaceous crops and were asked to raise crops like chilli, tomato, brinjal. Students of class X learn about various field crops and horticultural crops and were asked to cultivate paddy and few other vegetables like lady’s finger, cluster bean, bitter gourds, pumpkin etc. Students of class XI took up the cultivation of various vegetables like cluster bean, chillies, lady’s finger, tomato, bitter gourd and also paddy. The students of class XII also grew paddy and few vegetables. Children enthusiastically cultivated the crop assigned to them. This spark also ignited the fire in them to cultivate more plants. Few students took

interest in planting few other crops. Children also took to terrace gardening by growing vegetable and ornamental crops. They started sharing reports about the status of their crop on a daily/weekly basis to me and their peers who were a part of the WhatsApp group created for uploading of materials related to the subject. This proved to be a peer motivation for others in the group.

A survey and analysis were carried out among students on the benefits and lessons learnt from this innovation and the following results were arrived at:

BENEFITS:

- This Created enthusiasm in children to grow plants and tend them
- Opened up opportunity to virtually work in a group
- Created opportunity to practically do things and learn
- Students enjoyed watching plants grow, learnt about various stages, pest and disease management, crop duration and about organic cultivation
- This also paved way for taking up planting operations of other plants not assigned to them
- Parents also got inspired on seeing the involvement of their wards and took to planting operations
- Most of the students reported a good yield from the plants
- The students and their family got access to chemical free organically cultivated produce

LESSONS LEARNT:

- Few students had problem in purchase of grow bags and potting mixture.
- Due to incessant rain few students lost their plants.

Therefore, it was found necessary to counsel students to access grow bags and potting mixture from local nurseries.

To familiarize the school students and expose them to various indigenous rice varieties, the school took an initiative to grow 13 different varieties of traditional rice in the school premises. The varieties include Vasana Seeragasamba, Thanga samba, ott daiyan, kattuyanum, Thulasi Vasana Seeragasamba, Illupai Poo Samba, Karuppu Kavoni, Mappillai Samba, Kaala Namak, Rama Halli, Thengai Poo Samba and Vaalan Samba. Once the school reopened for Secondary and Senior Secondary classes, the students practically could get to know these indigenous rice varieties. Thus, Skill Education at ONGC Public School did not take a backseat even during the times of COVID.

This success story is worth emulating by other schools equally placed.