

Creating Avenues in Government Schools to Increase Time Contributed by Parents and Increase Parental Involvement

By Kingsuk Roy and Shruti Mohil

“In a school year a child spends: 7800 hours at home and 900 hours at school, which teacher should be the most accountable”- Jim Trelease¹

All over the world, the role of parents’ involvement in children’s education is being recognized more and more, by education practitioners and academicians alike. Numerous studies have shown that children tend to perform better at schools, have better learning outcomes (and other benefits), if their parents are engaged in their education at home and school. Given the interest in and importance of the matter, it is perhaps natural to ask what parental involvement means. A parent is said to be engaged if he/she participates actively in the child’s education to improve his/her learning and overall development². The engagement of parents can be in two ways – at home, by supporting the child in studies, homework and school work, and in school, by attending meetings, volunteering etc. Although, it is appropriate to add here that active participation is only one of the ways (albeit most important) parents can be involved and influence their children’s learnings. This is what many believe to be *investment* in their children. Apart from this, children can learn or pick up characteristics of their parents. This happens mostly passively or subconsciously, may be even without the parents noticing it. This is what many call *endowment*³. The key takeaway from such discussion is that parents influence their children, knowingly and often unknowingly. The time spent by parents with their children shapes the children’s character, cognitive ability and much more. A study done by the NGO Saajha shows that the children with parent(s) staying home has better odds at achieving higher education goals. This is especially true if the parent staying home is the mother. This study was done on 3056 students, studying in 6th Standard of 69 different Municipal schools in New Delhi. We gathered information on their parents’ occupation and education attainment, and children’s reading levels. The reading levels were measured using standardized tools from *ASER*⁴. For the study, we used these reading levels as proxies to the educational achievements of the children. This may look a little odd and insufficient at the first look, but experience of working on the ground tells us that this is one of

¹ (Trelease, 2013)

² (Epstein, 2011)

³ (Jani Erola, 2016 (44))

⁴ ASER tools have been developed by Pratham

the most crucial challenges faced by the children studying in these schools. We have also taken the occupation 'Home-Maker' as a proxy of time spent in home and therefore with their children. The assumption is that, if at least one of the parent stays home, the interaction time between the parent(s) and their children increases, even if the parent(s) may not actively spend all of that time with their children. This proxy has been taken because data on time spent by parents with children is difficult to collect and often the data collected is far from accurate. We found that for the children having at least one parent as home-maker, the odds of reaching reading level 5 (the highest reading level) are 1.16 times higher than those who do not have any parent as home-maker. Some may argue that, this happens because the mothers/parents spend time with their children actively to increase their educational achievement/ reading level. But, the result holds true for even those mothers who are not educated, and therefore, we assume that they are not endowed to actively help their children to achieve higher educational goals. If we see the results for mothers who have completed less than 1st standard, the odds of the children reaching reading level 5 is 1.11 times higher for the home-makers. For the mothers educated up to 5th standard, the odd goes up to 1.14 times higher for home-makers. Also, the odds for children reaching reading level 5 is actually higher by 1.03 times for those mothers who are home-makers and completed less than 1st standard than those who are not home-makers. This latter group includes parents who are highly educated as well. This result nullifies the argument that higher educational achievement of the children is due to active time investment by the parents towards that goal, at least to some extent.

What we are trying to argue is that, when parents invest time in their children, they try to achieve some pre-conceived goals. It is very well possible, and often is the case that, apart and above these pre-conceived goals, they achieve other goals as well. This happens because through the invested time, they either create endowments for themselves or the children which help them to achieve more than expected at that time or in future. One example of such intervention is of a two-month Longitudinal Program by Saajha, which was run in the summer vacations of 2018 in 25 MCD schools, with 550 parents. As part of the programme, the parents were given simple worksheets which they could complete together with their children, at home. The worksheets were kept very simple with the knowledge that the parents are not educated and in all probability, wouldn't be able to complete worksheets if they were too complicated. Apart from that, some activities were sent to them through IVRS calls to do with their children. These were

designed around knowledge and appreciation of each other. A pilot survey of some of the parents before the programme revealed that they did not know how to spend time with their children, i.e., they did not know what to do when they are with their children. Accordingly, the expected goal of the programme was that, by end of it, parents should know how to spend their time with their children in a fruitful manner. One result of the intervention was that, these parents now spent more 'quality' time with their children. The exact time spent prior to, and after the intervention was not measured, but the parents reported the increase in time spent on activities similar to those given in the programme. Parents built an understanding on what activities to do with the children in the time available to them. Also, this impact was noticed that out of the parents who regularly engaged with their children at home through the activities suggested, 50% of the children had an increase of 1 reading level and 40% students posted a 2-level increase in reading level. With the irregular parents, about only 40% of the students whose parents were irregular posted such an increase. But one impact which was not thought of prior to the programme was that, some of the parents who could not read, started reading alphabets and words in Hindi. What effect this will bring has to be tracked, but it might very well be the case that now these parents will be able to assist their children better in their studies. If these children show better academic performances in future, those effects can be traced back to this programme at least in some parts, although this was not an intended outcome of the programme.

Similar experience was with Kashaf, a parent member in Yamuna Vihar, who got involved in Saajha's community development programme and started running a library in her community in 2016. When she started, she only knew Arabic. It was creating problems because she was not able to send data on the library use in the community, as the form was in Hindi. But after one year, it was realised that she has learnt not only to read but also write in Hindi, and was maintaining data in Hindi. This was not one of the expected outcomes when the programme started, but nonetheless held tremendous potential for further development of her character, along with her children.

The process of involvement in schools work in very similar ways. Parents involved in schools/communities take up certain projects to develop certain aspects of the school/community, but in the process create endowments in those places which help children in some other aspects as well. We have come across numerous such cases. Here, we will share a couple of such cases to explain our point better. The first instance is about Rekha, whose efforts

improved the condition of washrooms in a girls' school in Kalkaji, where she is a member of the School Management Committee (SMC). The toilets in this school were blocked with sanitary napkins scattered everywhere, and no dustbins were kept in the toilet. Children would be unable to use the toilets and a strong stench would emanate from that area. Rekha led the SMC team to get the toilets cleaned and useable. She informed later that the overall attendance of the school also improved after the toilets became 'functional'. So, the intended outcome was to tackle an infrastructural issue. But solving that particular issue tackled the problem of low attendance to some extent, which in turn may produce other results in future. Another example of a change brought about by a parent, by devoting time in the school is that of Sunita, who is a homemaker, and an SMC member in Moti Nagar. She regularly visited the school to counsel students and bring about a sense of discipline in them. She and the SMC team visited classrooms, talked to children about moral values and importance of discipline. The discipline of the students improved over the weeks and they also grew close to her. They would sometimes even share their personal problems with Sunita, and she would help them, wherever possible.

Many parents are willing to be more engaged at the school but are unable to do so. But in last few years, the Government of Delhi has tried to create and support such avenues which encourage parents to get more involved in school and at home. SMCs are one such avenue. A survey of more than 900 nominees to SMCs from different schools, done by Saajha before the SMC elections in 2017, revealed that almost 80% of these nominees see SMCs as platforms to contribute something to the larger society. Other avenues have also been created for the parents to contribute and voice their opinions. The SMC sabhas, have become a platform for parents to voice their grievances related to school. Mega PTM is another initiative which encourages parents to come to the schools and talk to their children's teachers about their progress. Parental workshops during Mission Buniyad were conducted for parents every Saturday in which they were given activities to do with the child at home.

But, the parents still carry a strong desire to be more involved for their child's development. Some factors that don't allow them to fully participate in the school-related activities are: attitude— parents feel that they don't share openly in discussions, school staff believe that parents don't care much about their child's school; logistics— many working and daily wage parents if attend a program, they have to take a leave or let go of a day's earnings, and Lack of skills and

knowledge— parents don't know how they'll contribute to the meetings/ discussions⁵. Overcoming these roadblocks will help parents get more involved in the child's school and learning.

Thus, we feel that there's a strong need to create more such avenues and platforms for the parents which will push them to devote more time in their child's learning. This should ideally be combinations of school-related activities/meetings/ training and home-based interventions. One key aspect which potentially holds promise for further development in many directions is parents' education. The data collected at Saajha shows that the odds of reaching the highest reading level are 1.32 times higher for children whose fathers have studied at least till 11th standard, than those whose fathers have studied till less than 11th standard. If this is calculated for mothers, the odds go up to 1.35 higher for children with mothers educated at least till 11th standard than those whose mothers are not educated till 11th standard. And if both the father and mother are educated at least till 11th standard, the odds of such children reaching the highest reading level are 1.48 times higher than the others. This shows the centrality of parents' education on their children's educational development. In our experience, this is also an area where the parents in Government school in Delhi lack considerably. We shall like to end this discussion by sharing the story of Asifa, who lives in Shaheen Bagh. She, like many others, became a part of the parental workshop of Delhi Government during the summer vacations this year. But she could not help her younger daughter with the worksheets, because she was not educated. But she made sure that her elder daughter sits and helps her sister in completing the worksheets. She was lucky to have one daughter who can read. But, there are many very spirited parents, who are ready and determined to fight the odds for a good education and future for their children but not as lucky as Asifa to have the support she has. We are convinced that, avenues in this direction can be and should be opened by the authorities, so that no parents find these kinds of obstacles in front of them in future.

⁵ (M, 2014 3(2))

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Annexure 1

Certificate

The paper/poster/video/ Paper titled “Creating Avenues in Government Schools to Increase Time Contributed by Parents and Increase Parental Involvement” submitted to Government of NCT of Delhi, Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights, for the *National Conference on Delivering Quality Services to Our Children*, is based on my original work. The research work has not been submitted elsewhere.

The material borrowed from other sources and incorporated in the thesis has been duly acknowledged.

I understand that I myself could be held responsible and accountable for plagiarism, if any, detected later on.

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Signature of the candidate