



Interview: schools coping with COVID-19

SOME SCHOOLS HAVE TAKEN RAPID MEASURES TO PREVENT LEARNING LOSS DUE TO THE ONGOING COVID-19 PANDEMIC. DR VISHAL VARIA SHARES THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ROSARY GROUP OF SCHOOLS IN A CONVERSATION THAT INCLUDES SOME USEFUL TIPS FOR SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS.

In the past few days, schools across the globe and in India have been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the situation, schools have been forced to move to online learning within a short period of time and teachers have been busy designing and delivering online courses. School managements are occupied with emergency academic planning so that they can help teachers, and in turn learners, in the best possible way.

What is the impact on learners?

Vishal Varia, Managing Director, Rosary Group of Schools, says that the closure of schools will have a tremendous impact on learners. Fixed learning schedules will be disturbed as online modules do not have a rigid arrangement. Teachers will not be able to support learners directly – they will not be able to motivate learners or supervise their work. It can also have a specific impact on certain tasks; for instance, students might lose control over their habit of writing.

Early grade learners will suffer the most – they will not be able to cope with online teaching as well as high school students. And even at high school level, pupils with an inclination towards technology are likely to be better engaged with online classes.

How are teachers coping?

‘Teachers are our superheroes without a cape. They are not only taking up the challenge of working differently but are setting an example of working in challenging times’, Varia adds.

Right before the complete lockdown, when students had stopped coming to schools but teachers were still attending, teachers of the Rosary Group of Schools participated in Faculty Development Programmes (FDPs) to focus on communication and delivery mechanisms. Now that teachers are at home, they have also created a WhatsApp group to connect with colleagues and share tips and challenges of teaching from home. They are also sharing videos on emerging teaching and learning techniques.

Varia says ‘This is a first-of-a-kind emergency that we are facing at the moment and we are developing ourselves on a daily basis to handle this uncertain situation.’

‘We also tell our teachers that it is important to spend quality time with family and limit working hours in these times. Teachers have flexibility in delivering these lessons, but it is mandatory for them to deliver one hour lessons on a daily basis.’

What tools are teachers using to collaborate or learn new skills?

‘There are a number of tools available for teachers to teach and collaborate remotely. Although teachers might not have had the opportunity to use these when teaching in the classroom, they might find them useful now.’

Varia shared his curated list with Teacher.

- Google Classroom: Used for learning exchanges.

- Flock: App used for remote collaboration.

- Teaching Channel: One of the most used professional learning platforms in USA which has been made free for teachers during these times.

- Teach Thought: Another professional learning platform with lots of articles on new topics and examples.

- Flinnt: An Indian learning app for K10 students. It’s an easy platform just like Google Classroom or WhatsApp but is especially designed for education.

- Telegram: Primarily a communication platform but there are specific channels that teachers can use.

Varia adds ‘We should be proud of the Flinnt app as it is made in India for the Indian context.’

‘This is also a good time for teachers to invest in their own professional development.’ He suggests several websites and educational portals for teachers – Swayam, Udemy, Unacademy, Simplilearn, Upgrad, CourseEra, Google for Education, etc.

What teaching methods has your school adopted?

‘We have students from less privileged backgrounds also, and not all of them have access to a laptops or tablet. But they have access to their parents’ smart phone. Thus, we have used our mobile application to supply assignments for students. They take photos of completed assignments and upload them on the app.’

‘But as the government has announced mass promotion of students to the next grade, teachers have reported that many of them have lost interest in completing the assignments.’

How are you communicating with parents?

‘We have shared circulars with parents on WhatsApp groups and our mobile application emphasising the importance of keeping children busy with learning during this time. We cannot afford to break the momentum of learning. We have also shared a schedule with parents – it covers different subjects including drawing, craft, and painting.’

Varia says the school has suggested parents consider keeping their children engaged in education games such as Word Swipe, Mental Education, Math Riddles, Kids Quick GK, Word Connect, etc.

What tips would you share with other school leaders and management?

‘Our school leaders are vigilant and alert. They are monitoring this situation closely’. He suggests a few points.

- Boost the constructive and creative approach of the staff.
- Ask teachers to share some creative work of their own on a common platform of the school.
- Allot teachers badges like ‘Creative Teacher’ or ‘Super Star’ to boost their morale.
- Use the school Enterprise Resource Planner (ERP) or communication channel, engage parents and children by sharing good videos and messages from the Principal/school leader.
- If possible, ask your teachers to share one video a day where they will provide tips to constructively engage children at home.

Do IT abilities of teachers help in such situations?

‘Absolutely! Teachers who have access to high-speed internet and are tech-friendly can easily adapt to the new situation. They can engage in social media groups not just for personal purposes but also professional purposes. This is the time to unleash the power of social media and technology.’

What are the challenges that your school has been facing?

‘There are a lot of challenges in teaching online. This drastic change was brought about by the pandemic and we were given very little time to prepare.’

Varia notes that some of the challenges include:

- Poor internet connectivity.
- Lack of availability of suitable devices at home.
- Parents share assignments with the children late.

In particular, Varia notes that ‘flexi

availability’ implies that online classes cannot be conducted at one common time. Many children miss joining the session and are left to watch the recording.

What is the one piece of advice you would give to schools?

‘Teachers are the core strength of any school and our education system.

Teaching is a full-time job. Under these uncertain circumstances, teachers have to work tirelessly outside the regular timetable. Without their commitment and willingness to adopt technology, tackling the challenge of learning during this pandemic would be impossible.’**T**



Interview conducted and written by Anannya Chakraborty.

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