

# Learning to Adapt

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This pandemic has shown that ‘necessity is the basis of all adaptations’ by creating a need for our teachers to build their skills in various areas of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), once alien to them, just so that they can reach their students. To be with their students as a supportive adult, listen to how they are feeling, provide emotional support and, if possible, try to teach something so that children do not get completely disconnected with education is the goal of most of our teachers.

*WhatsApp* groups, *MS teams*, *Google Meet*, and *Zoom* are some of the applications being used by our teachers to connect with their students. Creating *YouTube* videos and recordings are other strategies by which they are trying to reach their students along with writing blogs. Many of them are also developing animation videos to increase student participation. These platforms are also used effectively by our teachers to learn from each other.

This pandemic has helped our teachers explore various possibilities of technology and a knowledge base of using online platforms has been built. This would help them in offering blended learning experiences to their students, as envisioned in our National Educational policy 2020, once the situation is back to normal.

In this article, I will share the efforts of a few of our teachers in government schools and their learning curve in adapting to new technologies to stay connected with their students. Most of the success stories are of teachers who have built a good relationship with the parents of their students as well as with the communities because of their work. This is helping them in reaching their students and engaging with them even from a distance.

## Teachers’ stories

### Case study 1

To support his students’ learning during the lockdown, Somu Sir, one of the proactive teachers of our district, gained the support of the school alumni who lived in the same village. Of his eighteen students, only six had smartphones, the rest were supported by the alumni to complete

their daily assignments sent by the teacher through a *WhatsApp* group. The old students, who are now in college, made sure that the children completed their assignments on time. Somu Sir also made the effort to connect with his students over video calls, again with the help of the alumni, to keep them motivated in their learning.

His students and their parents were very excited to see their favourite teacher speaking to them over video calls, as was Somu Sir who was able to see his students after a long gap of two months. Though initially a few of his students were a bit shy to open up, their parents interacted regularly with Sir and shared the daily happenings around the village. Somu Sir had also used this opportunity to build awareness in the communities on tackling the Coronavirus. One of his senior students, who has completed a diploma in Education started conducting English classes for these students, Somu Sir was delighted to share this with us.

### Assignments over *WhatsApp*

After the school started for the teachers, as soon as Somu Sir entered the village, all his students came running to see him, hold his hands and speak to him, but sadly, Sir had to send them back home. They all returned with sorrowful faces, which Somu Sir found very touching. Many students demanded to be allowed to come to the school, but Sir was helpless as there were orders not to conduct classes in the school.

The children used to play near the temple in the village. One fine day in June, with the support of the School Development and Monitoring Committee (SDMC) members and a few parents, Somu Sir started his classes in the temple premises itself. He knew it was risky, but since it was a shared decision he decided to go ahead.

To teach his students, Sir is now using *Nali-Kali* cards and books supplied by the government as part of the *Odu Karnataka* programme which was launched to enable children to acquire basic reading fluency, ability to recognise numbers and do basic arithmetic operations with the help of appropriate teaching-learning materials.



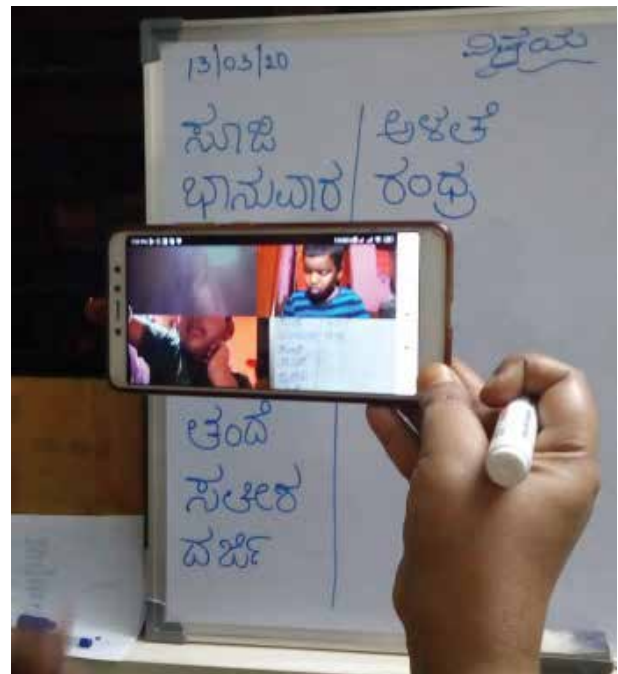
### Case study 2

Srigowri Madam, one of the most inspiring teachers of our district, started connecting with the parents of her students over a *WhatsApp* group which she had started the previous year. Attending the online training programmes organised by the Education Department as well as those conducted by the Azim Premji Foundation and the online classes conducted by her daughter's school gave her the idea of starting her own online classes.

Srigowri Madam also spoke to the parents about her idea. It is interesting to note that she has always been able to involve parents in all her work and was able to persuade them about virtual classes. Quickly, she connected with the Foundation's resource persons in the field and sought their support, fixed a time and started classes after providing many practice sessions to the parents. Initially, many parents struggled but Srigowri Madam made video and audio recordings with detailed instruction on using Zoom which helped them understand the process of joining. A few educated parents also supported others to get familiar with using this application.

It was with a great sense of accomplishment that she saw all her students for the first time over the phone. Her students were also thrilled to see her. When they started calling her, 'Miss, Miss!' and telling her that they could see her, she felt like she was back in her classroom.

A week after the online classes started, the village Panchayat President called her up and expressed his gratitude for her initiative, which motivated her. She says that even if the parents are out of town on work, they make sure they return on time so as to give their phones to their children so that they can join the class. Now they have successfully shifted their online classes to the *Google Meet* application. The children themselves are operating it and attending the classes with ease.



Srigowri Madam's online class

Srigowri Madam records her session every day with a screen recorder application and shares it with the parents. She has made sure that parents sit with the students during the interactions. She teaches the grade II English medium students. She runs her classes in three batches between six and nine in the evening, with ten children in each batch. She has specially arranged a whiteboard for her online classes. She also prepares worksheets which are given to a photocopying shop from where parents collect them and ensure that their wards complete and share these on the *WhatsApp* group. Srigowri Madam also runs a *YouTube* channel where she posts all her work with the children so that parents get an idea of their children's progress.

Madam is very excited about her classes and is happy that she is able to reach her students and provide moral support. She shared an instance of a boy who never spoke in her class but is now able to speak confidently in the virtual classes. Madam says, 'Children look for new things every day. As teachers, it is our responsibility to keep exploring innovative ways to facilitate learning.'

### Case study 3

Shamshiya Madam from Sirsi has yet another interesting strategy to engage with her students of grades V to VII. Her online engagements started with her Spoken English classes which she has been conducting over the phone for the parents of her students. A few of her students were motivated by this and wanted her to give them assignments on a daily basis so that they could also work on their English.

Participants from her *English Club* as well as alumni of her school are supporting the students who do not have access to android phones. Audio clippings, short videos etc were shared, even though there

were network issues in the village. Various assignments were also given to these groups and feedback shared. To motivate her students, drawing, essay writing, debate, riddles and other competitions were conducted through *WhatsApp groups*.

Now that schools have reopened for teachers, Shamshiya Madam is printing worksheets (at her own cost) to help her students achieve various learning outcomes. The assignments are sent to her students through their parents. She tries her best to call up each of her students personally and explain the assignments and answer their queries. Shamshiya Madam acknowledges the role of her school community members and alumni in reaching the students and keeping them engaged.

### Some hurdles

These are three accounts of our teachers going out of their way and coming up with many innovative ideas to engage their children during the pandemic. Though there were initial hiccups in reaching the students, our teachers were able to train themselves with the technological know-how and were able to engage their students successfully.

Despite these success stories, our teachers are struggling to reach out to many of their students, the majority of whom do not own smartphones. Even if they are able to procure one, many parents cannot afford internet packs. There are many who still do not have a basic phone. Education is the lowest priority in many of these households, where parents struggle to earn their next meal. Children are also working as labourers in farms and other places to supplement their family income. Looking at these problems, the apprehension of widening societal inequity grips the mind. School and education are the only solutions.



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