

HEALTHY PRACTICES

Best Practice I

Conducting of Saraswati Puja by Girl Students

1. Title of the Practice

This title should capture the keywords that describe the Practice.

“Conducting of Saraswati Puja by Girl Students”.

2. Goal

Describe the aim of the practice followed by the institution. Brief the underlying principles or concepts in about 100 words.

As far as memory goes, Saraswati Puja has been celebrated in this college. The Goddess Saraswati is the goddess of learning and the arts, and her puja is celebrated on the initiative of the students, though the staff also participate enthusiastically. For the last ten years this Puja has been celebrated in the Auditorium, so that it is accessible to the general public and to parents and guardians as well. However, till the year 2010, this Puja had been conducted the traditional way, with a hired male priest. From 2010 onwards the college has decided to conduct the Puja with the students as priests. This has been envisaged as a part of the purpose to empower girls, and encourage them to make inroads into male-dominated professions.

3. The Context

Describe any particular contextual feature or challenging issues that have had to be addressed in designing and implementing the Practice in about 150 words.

When the idea first took root in the imagination of the Principal, she discussed it in the Teachers' Council. That was in 2009. It met with stiff resistance from several male teachers, particularly those of the Sanskrit Department. We could not implement it that year. The next year, that is, 2010, the girls were encouraged to conduct the Puja themselves. Two students learnt the manner and Sanskrit chants, and did a good job of it. The move received a lot of hype from local newspapers. The same was done in 2011. From the year 2012, the college decided to go one step forward – there would be a training session in the college itself, for seven days, and about ten students would be trained by a Sannyasi of Ramkrishna Mission. This gave a completely new dimension to the move, and the Puja therefore became qualitatively better. The same was done this year as well.

4. The Practice

Describe the Practice and its implementation. Include anything about this practice that may be unique in the Indian higher education. Please also identify constraints or limitations, if any, in about 400 words.

A Saraswati Puja sub-committee is formed at the beginning of the session in the Teachers' Council. Student representatives are also included in this committee. The entire job is divided into two – the Puja itself, and the Khichuri Bhog (which is held about a week later, and includes all the 2,500 students and staff of the college). Two groups of teachers are put in charge of these two sections of the Saraswati Puja celebrations.

The first group has an added responsibility – that of arranging the training of the students who will conduct the Puja. The Ramkrishna Mission was extremely helpful, and lauded the initiative of the college of encouraging women priests in the campus. They sent a sannyasi and a teacher to train the group of eight girls to conduct the Puja. The training included the chanting of mantras in such a perfect way, that the students can recite them on the microphone for all to hear. The training was aimed at giving the message that even for conducting a Puja there must be seriousness of approach and perfection of technique. On the day of the Puja these girls' performance on the microphone was exemplary.

This manner of conducting Saraswati Puja generated a lot of interest among the students, and there was record attendance in the Auditorium on that day. Public feedback showed that on the whole the general public appreciated the move, though it has so far been wrongly thought that the public will not accept girls as priests.

On the evening of Saraswati Puja a Rangoli competition was organized, and the burst of colour that ensued not only displayed the talents of the students, it also served to beautify the huge Auditorium hall.

After the Puja was over, the Khichuri Bhog was held seven days later. It was open for all the students, staff, and well wishers of the college, and 1600 people had khichuri on that day. The entire process was planned and conducted by the students, and though they did not actually cook the meal, they took the entire responsibility of distribution on themselves. This, too, was a great success.



Saraswati Puja being conducted by girls



Cultural Function



Contribution to the Rangoli competition

5. Evidence of Success

Provide evidence of success such as performance against targets and benchmarks and review results. What do these results indicate? Describe in about 200 words.

To organize Saraswati Puja with girl priests is an innovative step, aimed at assisting the empowerment of girls, and give them encouragement to encroach on male-dominated fields or professions. In Purulia, one of most backward districts of the country, using girl priests for a public puja is absolutely unheard of. The fact that it is successful has been tested ever since 2010, but this year we went one step forward, and arranged for expert trainers for the priests who would conduct the Puja. The success of this venture is seen in three ways –

- a) The manner of conducting the Puja was technically faultless.

- b) The general public accepted the matter wholeheartedly, and several people from outside came to the college for Pushpanjali.
- c) The students showed great enthusiasm, and came in large numbers to attend the Puja. The Saraswati Puja of Nistarini College has received wide coverage in local newspapers.

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

Please identify the problems encountered and resources required to implement the practice in about 150 words.

A Saraswati Puja fund is created at beginning of each year from the fees collected from the students. This fund is used both for the Puja and the Khichuri Bhog. As such, even without too much luxury, this fund is enough to meet up with the costs.

The only problem that has been faced regarding this step has occurred because of social superstition and narrowness of outlook. It is a sorrowful matter that a number of teachers (from the Sanskrit Dept) strongly opposed the move, and refused to attend the Puja. Even though most of the public accepted the idea enthusiastically, there were some local priests who openly opposed girls performing puja. But we are fortunate that this number is extremely low, and on the whole the students were given the message that girls can do anything.

7. Notes (Optional)

Any other information that may be relevant and important to the reader for adopting/ implementing the Best Practice in their institution about 150 words.

Any institution, without exception, can implement such programmes in the college. In Women's colleges and girls' schools, especially, this idea can be implemented, and will be beneficial in the long run, to promote women's empowerment and prevent gender disparity.

8. Contact Details

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Best Practices – 2

Earn While You Learn Scheme

1. Title of the Practice

This title should capture the keywords that describe the Practice.

“Earn While You Learn Scheme”.

2. Goal

Describe the aim of the practice followed by the institution. Brief the underlying principles or concepts in about 100 words.

The “Earn While You Learn” Scheme was devised to take care of two main issues – shortage of staff in the library, and a method to tackle the financial needs of poor students. During the last two years, one librarian has resigned from his post, having joined another college, and one library clerk has retired. One library peon had previously died in harness, and his post has not yet been filled, in spite of several applications to the government. As per government order, no casual staff can be engaged without permission from the government. To find a solution to this problem, the Principal proposed in the Governing Body that 3rd Year students can be engaged against remuneration, to do service in the library. This will enable them to earn some money for their studies, and will also create support staff for the library. Poor students will be given preference.

3. The Context

Describe any particular contextual feature or challenging issues that have had to be addressed in designing and implementing the Practice in about 150 words.

The main challenge was to find an acceptable solution for both the staff shortage, and for student welfare. During the peak months, when the college is in full swing, it became a genuine problem to cater to the large numbers of students who used the library. Moreover, the task of helping the students to access books, and to put back the returned books in their proper positions, was also becoming arduous without support staff. The Principal was continuously being flooded with complaints from the Librarian regarding staff shortage, and the problems she had to face in keeping the library in full working condition during the peak months. This led to the Principal to suggest that the students be given the chance to help out, and earn some pocket money in the process. The Librarian and the members of the Library Committee welcomed the proposal, and the Principal placed the proposal in the Governing Body for approval.

4. The Practice

Describe the Practice and its implementation. Include anything about this practice that may be unique in the Indian higher education. Please also identify constraints or limitations, if any, in about 400 words.

After detailed discussion in the Library Committee meeting dated 20/11/2019, the proposal was placed in the Governing Body meeting dated 22/11/2019. The resolution of the Governing Body, given below, will show, in a nutshell how the programme will be run –

“The Principal placed the resolution of the Library Committee dated 20/11/2019. The Library Committee proposed for implementation of the programme ‘Earn While You Learn’, involving the students of the 5th Semester / 3rd Year Programme Course, in the Library, as at present the Library has suffered with shortage of staff. The Library Committee proposed to recruit 10 students from 5th semester / 3rd Year Programme Course, and they will be paid an honorarium / stipend of Rs.50/- per hour. The Librarian Ms. Mousumi Mahato was also requested to prepare a roster of the students as per her requirement in the library. It was also proposed in the Library Committee meeting that the students selected in the said programme will be provided with an apron. The House welcomed and approved this proposal”.

Immediately after the Governing Body meeting the programme was initiated by a notification, requesting applications from the students of the 5th semester or 3rd Year Programme course. The interview of the applicants was held on 14th February 2020, and the list of selected participants was published on 17th February 2020. Twelve students were selected. They worked according to a roster, for a maximum of four hours per day, at Rs.50/- per hour. Two students worked everyday. When the Library Book Show was held, three students were called in to help. They worked for a total of 18 days before lockdown was declared because of the spread of COVID 19 virus. The total cost was Rs.7,400/-. Apart from this, each student was given an apron to differentiate them from the other girls of the college, and the cost of these aprons was Rs.3,660/-

The biggest constraint that came up was the lockdown because of the corona virus. The programme was continuing with great success, but had to be stalled because all educational institutions were closed from 15th March 2020. The Librarian was happy with the help she received from the students, and the programme will have to continue after the college opens after the lockdown.

5. Evidence of Success

Provide evidence of success such as performance against targets and benchmarks and review results. What do these results indicate? Describe in about 200 words.

The biggest success of the “Earn While You Learn Scheme” was that it fulfilled both the requirements for which it was initiated – the problems of under-staffing in the college library, and student welfare. The students of the final year Programme Course were chosen because, first, they are maturer than the others, and secondly, they have more time on their hands than the students of the Honours course. Also, there are many students of the Programme course who come from poor families. All these issues were dealt with through the scheme. The teachers were also happy because these students got an opportunity to handle books, which, they thought, would develop a love in them for books. They would also get an opportunity for meaningful and responsible work. All these benefits were noticed from the implementation of this scheme.

The Librarian and the teachers are determined that this scheme will be continued as soon as the college opens after lockdown.

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

Please identify the problems encountered and resources required to implement the practice in about 150 words.

All programmes and schemes, however positive, encounter problems during implementation. The first problem that we encountered was that there were many students who wished to work in the library, and the library will never be able to accommodate all of them. This leads to disappointment among the students. But for now, this is a problem that cannot be totally solved. The college is planning on various other ways through which the “Earn While You Learn Scheme” can be implemented, but it will be some time before such plans can fructify, for until the college opens after lockdown, these plans cannot be discussed in detail.

The lockdown because of COVID 19 is another dampener. The scheme was running very smoothly, and both the Librarian and the students were happy with the scheme. But a temporary stop came on the scheme, and until the college opens, the scheme cannot be put on the rails again.

So far the funds required have come up to about Rs.12,000/- for 18 days, but more funds will be required if the scheme is running during all the peak months of the college. These funds will be paid from the Library Fund.

7. Notes (Optional)

Any other information that may be relevant and important to the reader for adopting/ implementing the Best Practice in their institution about 150 words.

For implementing this Best Practice, what must be remembered is the fact that the Library, along with the Library Committee, has to ensure that needy students get the first chance to work in the library against payment. To find students who are both needy and efficient is not an easy job, and a long process has to be in place to obtain applications, to process these applications, to call an interview of these students, and to finally select the right persons for the job. Also, the Principal must ensure that budgetary provisions are made for the scheme after the lockdown is lifted.

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