

Middle School Shiksha Protsahan Kendra -I

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Shiksha Protsahan Kendra (SPK) is an effort by the Eklavya organisation in collaboration with the local community to provide quality education to children in innovative ways. This is a place where children learn at their own pace and their parents can come without any hesitation and intervene in the management and operations of the centre. They can meet the centre operators, or teachers, (those who teach children at the centre) and ask questions regarding their studies. There is no hurry to complete the course, nor is there a competitive atmosphere. Every child here attempts to acquire the capabilities of mainstream education in his/her own way, which was missing in the hectic schedule of school life.

In some districts of Madhya Pradesh, *Prathamik Shiksha Karyakram* (PRASHIKA), run by the Eklavya, has left an indelible impression in the education world. The concept emerged from the experiences of this programme which showed that the effort to change the educational system is incomplete without community participation. SPK programmes are being run for about twenty years for children of primary schools in different areas through Eklavya.

Primary Shiksha Protsahan Kendra

SPK works for two hours before or after school hours near the primary school, in the village or neighbourhood with about thirty five children in a centre. We try to take children who need the maximum help in their studies and priority is given to girls, children of deprived castes or families. A local centre operator, usually from the village itself, is chosen with the consent of the community to run the centre and is given academic training. Eklavya provides the materials to be used by the children and the honorarium of the centre operator. In some places, some part of the honorarium of the centre operators and cost of material is also shared by the parents. A committee consisting of some local people and parents is formed and hold monthly meetings. During the meeting, there are discussions and reviews regarding the centre's maintenance, management, children's studies, difficulties faced in the running of the centre and

the attendance of children. There is an associate for follow-up work for every five or six centres, who regularly observes the centres and helps the centre operator with every aspect of academic support and running of the centre.

Eklavya organises fortnightly and monthly meetings to provide regular academic support to the centre operators and associates wherein academic planning and preparations for the centre and the arrangements/problems related to the centre are discussed. The centre operators, associates and members of the parents' committee also visit other centres/institutions for capacity building, so that they can see the efforts being made there and incorporate them at their centres. Apart from this, a week's training is arranged for centre operators and associates twice a year. There is also a continuous assessment sheet in all the centres to assess and record the competencies acquired by the children. After preparing the children to a certain level, they are sent to join the mainstream education of the school and the other needy children come to the centre in their place.

With the passage of time, this form of SPK has become important and in Eklavya, this programme continues in many forms and is highly appreciated and even used as a model. Eklavya collaborates with these institutions to develop and establish the SPK model by providing assistance with training and teaching aids. One of the major reasons for the success of this programme is community involvement.

Middle School Shiksha Protsahan Kendra (MS-SPK)

in 2016 Eklavya started this experiment in twelve villages of Shahpur Vikaskhand in the Betul district of Madhya Pradesh with the financial support from Jamshedji Tata Trust Mumbai. As the name suggests, efforts have been made to teach the children from grades 6 to 8. The procedure followed to help the children of secondary schools is quite different from the primary *Shiksha Protsahan Kendra* as the needs of this age group and class are different from

that of primary school. Here we will talk about the aspects that make this experiment different, as well as the basis for these changes.

Centre Operator

The centre operator is like a friend who has the maximum engagement with the children and who is with the children every day in the role of a facilitator. In the primary SPK, the centre operator is selected from the local village. As children of grades 6 to 8 have to study subjects like mathematics, language, science and social science, it is necessary that the centre operator should have the understanding of these subjects to a certain extent and should also be ready to learn. Since most MS-SPKs were being opened in the far-flung villages, it was very difficult to get suitable centre operators in the villages. Although according to the SPK model the centre operator is selected by the community, we decided that we would try and find centre operators in nearby villages, pick two or three suitable candidates and suggest their names in the parents' meeting and one among them could be chosen by the community to run the centre. When we explained the problem of finding a local operator to the community, they agreed with us and we appointed centre operators in this manner.

Formation of groups

Prior to introducing children to the centre in primary SPK, a baseline test in mathematics and language is conducted for all the children. After analysing the results, a total of 35 children are admitted in the class and then they are divided into three groups, based on the abilities of the children. Group A has the highest performers, group B has medium performers and students group C are low performers. Children are assessed from time to time and the abilities acquired by them are entered in continuous evaluation sheet and then on that basis children move from group C to B and then to group A.

Student grouping is based on children's ability and not on the basis of their class or age. Our colleagues in the MS-SPK team felt it was not appropriate to label the children and that whatever name is given to the groups, the children would come to know after a while that the group they are in is based on their ability. So separating students according to their capabilities can negatively affect the confidence of pupils whose performance is not satisfactory. They feel inferior and lack confidence, more so when a child of grade 3, 4 or 5 is put in

group C on the basis of ability which is decided by the operator in the course of the classroom teaching and can be changed.

One of our long-term goals was to try continuously to build the capacity of the centre operator in order to maintain their autonomy and enable them to take better decisions for children in the class.

Our thinking about subjects

Mathematics

NCF 2005 says that 'all children can learn mathematics, and all children need to learn mathematics.' We work on this premise. Mathematics should not be a mere subject for children, they should use mathematics for reasoning, to solve the problems of their daily lives to use mathematical methods to solve their problems. In order to achieve these skills, it is essential that children have number sense (which includes the understanding of numbers and operations), which we work towards. We also chose some other concepts like fractions, percentage, decimal, negative numbers, mensuration, indices etc.

Before starting our work on these mathematical concepts, we conducted a baseline test for children and identified the areas where we had to do the maximum work with children. It was not possible to work on other mathematical abilities without these competencies. In my view, due to the graded nature of mathematics we have to move in a sequential manner to gain knowledge in it.

Language

Language is the basis for all subjects as it cuts across the curriculum and focuses on reading, writing and expression. Reading means reading with comprehension. We do not give priority to writing skills in the beginning, more attention is given to reading and expression. Although writing is also a medium of expression we pay more attention to oral expression. For this, the children's library and its books are our biggest resources. We work on language teaching through reading books and doing different types of activities with them like independent reading, group reading, storytelling, creating plays based on stories we have read, writing a daily diary, gathering news, creating *Bal-Akhbar*, a children's newspaper, writing letters to each other and singing poems. We believe in context-based teaching of language rather than the traditional method of teaching letters or words

Science

Children should not be given only conclusions and asked to memorise them, instead they should be encouraged to understand and share their understanding, express their opinions, experiment, investigate and conclude for themselves. Eklavya has developed the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme, an innovative model of science teaching and also created three textbooks for grades 6 to 8 entitled *Bal Vaigyanik*. Our work in the MS-SPK programme is based on these books.

Social Science

We choose small projects from the local context and environment such as collection and storage of *tendu* leaves, brick making process, survey of water resources in the village etc. Through these projects, we give the children opportunities to develop their competencies in understanding, analysing and comparing. Such small projects help children to analyse and learn about the happenings in their surroundings, how are they connected with them and how they affect them. Further, they can think, understand, discuss and talk about it in a better way. The experiments, done with children outside the classroom, have contributed immensely in enhancing their understanding.

Discussions on social issues

We started a new practice in the form of monthly meetings in which colleagues working in the MS-SPK team sit together on last Sunday of every month and read a paper on a particular topic or watch a movie and then discuss it. We talk about gender, race, exploitation, discrimination, equality, reservation and things happening around us. These discussions have helped to develop positive thinking among our members. After some time, the

members of the team are able to talk about these issues in the parents' meetings and implement changes. Parents' meetings are no longer held at any religious place because women were not able to participate during menstruation. We have been able to remove the myth to some extent that menstruation is a bodily function and not a 'curse' and now at least the team members have been able to overcome the misconceptions associated with it and efforts are on to raise awareness among parents. We have also been able to discuss the fact that no one can be discriminated on the basis of food, caste, colour, physical impairment or religion. Some short documentary films like *Laddu* available on YouTube have been very helpful in this regard. We have talked about many important issues with children, such as the good touch-bad touch, discrimination on the basis of each other's food, lifestyle and caste.

A lot of preparation and time is required for these efforts and we have tried to do our best. We regularly invite local youth to these meetings as they are concerned with educating people in these matters and have tried to connect them with these efforts. Within two or three years, we have been able to prepare about fifty young people who are helping us in different ways to bring awareness in villages.

MS-SPK is not an option for government schools in any way, it is an effort made in collaboration with the local community to help children and parents overcome the difficulties faced in the mainstream education of our school system. Such dialogues and discussions on education with the village community builds an educational environment in the village and strengthens these efforts.

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