

My Experience with Shiksha Protsahan Kendra-II

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We worked with the community in Tamia Vikas Khand, Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh, for three and a half years to develop a culture of reading and writing in rural areas by providing the children with educational literature and other related material, ensuring that educated young men and women of the village help them and the parents raise their children properly and send them to school regularly. At the same time, we tried to create a friendly environment in government schools so that children would not be scared of reading and writing and participate in the activities of the school with enthusiasm and confidence. Thus, a relationship between the community and the teachers was established. Necessary steps were taken to prepare the youth of the village in understanding the meaning of quality education so that they could themselves learn as well as teach their younger siblings and other children in their village.

What are Shiksha Protsahan Kendras?

In order to assist the children studying in government primary schools, Eklavya, together with the community, established fifty *Shiksha Protsahan Kendras* in thirty four villages, a centre from a house in the village or from a school. The centres in the school used to function for two hours before the school began. Around thirty children studying in the primary school of the village/locality registered. In these two hours, the children were trained to sharpen their skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in language and understanding numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication and division in mathematics.

Selection of the centre operator

Some of the community members took responsibility for the proper functioning of the fifty *Shiksha Protsahan Kendras* with seven members in each committee. Then the committee and the parents together selected the centre operators. The committee received the names of the educated youth of the village and the members discussed the matter. The centre operators were selected on the basis of their behaviour, his/her

educational qualifications and ability to work with children etc. After being selected, the operator would be told about their responsibilities, salary and participation in the monthly seminar training. Parent meetings were organised every month. It was the responsibility of the committee to review the achievements and problems of the centre and the work done.

Training

Eklavya organised a month's training programme for centre operators in Tamia. They were trained in reading literature on education and have discussions on it, referring to NCERT books for basic competencies in language and mathematics, learning to plan their work, participating in play way methods of teaching and maintaining a teaching diary.

Meetings were held in school every Saturday. Some of the issues discussed in the meeting were: reading out the details of the work done during the previous week and reading educational articles. The teachers of the school also participated in the meeting and shared their experiences. The plan for next week was put in place. Hands-on activities were taken up by the participants with the help of the teachers.

Method of teaching

The centre operator would make plans with the children in mind. S/he would decide on the concept that had to be developed and its aim, what activity/play would be suitable for it, what kind of exercises should follow this and other related matters.. They would keep an eye on what the children did, what they learnt and then enter the date in the continuous assessment sheet. Even their mistakes were entered in the assessment register and the next day they would be all set to help the child learn that concept by spending time with her and carrying out related activities.

All the 20-25 children from grades one to five were made to sit together and the first hour was allotted for language and the second for mathematics. Sometimes mathematics was taught for two

hours and the next day was dedicated to teaching language. In this way, efforts were made to help children become proficient in the basic skills of language and mathematics.

In order to make the children proficient in basic competencies, the book entitled *Padho-Likho Maja Karo* published by Eklavya was used for language while an NCERT book was used for mathematics.

Examples of activities

It was decided that initially, in language skill development, five easy and familiar words from their own environment would be taken per week. The words could be, for example- *cup* (cup), *bus* (bus), *nal* (tap), *mala* (necklace), *ek* (one). They would be introduced to these words, the sound of words and new words would be made from them. After this, all the children would sit in a circle and a story containing these words would be told in the first ten minutes. Later on, the story would be written on the board and read. Then the children of different levels would be made to sit in small groups and, depending on the level of reading ability they were in, would be asked to recognise the sounds of the words from the story and asked to make words by combining alphabets and *matras*. All this was through activities, play way methods and using various teaching materials so that children could recognise, read, write and identify the sounds of words.

Who came and who went is another game in which any three word cards is shown to all the children. A child goes out of the room and one of the three cards shown is replaced by a new card. For example *bus* is replaced with *ek*. The child who went out comes in and tries to find the new replaced card. Then he tells the class that *bus* has 'gone' from here and *ek* has 'come'.

Next, the words shown on picture cards are formed by combining the letters and *matra* cards. For example, the word *cup* would be read aloud. The rest of the children have to clap as many times as the letters in that word. For example, *cup* is made up of two letters in Hindi, so they would clap twice.

All the words are taken up one by one and children would clap according to the number of letters in that word. In the next activity, the children are asked to identify the last letter in the word *cup* is *pa* (in Hindi) and say other words beginning with that letter, They had to make words beginning with the sound, such as *pani* (water) or *patang* (kite). This could be extended to letters and *matras* in

the names of their classmates, creating new words with them and reading them aloud. Children who can read the words and recognise sounds are then given the chance to write short sentences and speak about those pictures, going on to the next stage of writing about the characters and incidents in a story. After the activity, the centre operators check the work done by the children and make a note in the continuous assessment register if the child has had difficulty in understanding something has not understood something. The next activity is planned with the idea of helping the child in that particular area.

Mathematics

Understanding of quantity and practice of addition-subtraction of solid items

In order to grasp the concept of quantity, children are made to sit in a big circle and count a hundred beads. The children come one by one and count. Small children count by ones while the older ones count by twos, fives and tens. They learn a lot through this activity.

A child is given fifty beads. Then she is sent out and some beads are taken away and hidden in a bowl. The child is called back and she counts the beads that are outside the bowl and tells the number of beads that are inside the bowl.

The understanding of place value, units, tens and hundreds is developed with the help of bundles of sticks. The bundles are placed before children and they are asked to give a certain number of sticks from those bundles. Suppose we ask them to give us forty five sticks, then the team will give four bundles and five sticks. Then the numbers are formed by using the place value card and written on the board. Then they are asked to identify greater and smaller numbers between the two given numbers. They are also asked to give reason for why it is big or small.

Other activities

From time to time, children would work on Children's Assembly, Children's Paper and paintings to be put in their files. Based on all these documents and activities, the teacher would decide which competencies the child has achieved in the entire year. Keeping this in mind, a report card is made once a year for the information of the teachers and parents of the primary classes.

Each centre was provided with enough literature on education, keeping in mind the need of children.

There were word cards, *matra* cards, sentence cards, poem posters, story posters, sentences / word strips from poems and stories, pictures made by children, compilation of local events, children's books, compilation of stories narrated by children, local games, collection of riddles, folk literature, *Padho-Likho Maja Karo* and *Khushi-Khushi* published by Eklavya and others.

Abacuses, number cards, place value cards, NCERT books, *Khushi-Khushi*, solid objects like pebbles, match sticks etc. were made available at the centre to teach mathematics and to understand the concept of quantity.

Library

To develop a culture of reading and writing in the village, a library was started in every centre and about two hundred books were given to each. Children took home books from the centre, read them and give them to all the elders and siblings at home to read. In this way the children were also encouraged to have a library of their own at home. Eklavya library books were taken to the village. Each parent came there with their children and chose three books. Thus they were helped to build a library in their homes.

The centre operators read stories to the children from the books kept at the centre. The children were helped to read from the books and teach others to read, talk about the pictures and write incidents of the stories and once even presented stories through a puppet show. The paintings and the stories written by the children were put up on the wall so that they could see pictures, read stories and events. Once in a month, a newspaper would be created by means of collecting children's stories, pictures and incidents. Children also listened to local stories parents narrated and the local context helped children learn to read.

Collecting information about local flora

Children were asked to write the names and uses of plants and trees that grow around them and the articles were read out to parents in the monthly parents' meeting. The children wrote very well about the medicinal value of the trees and plants. This gave them an opportunity to get acquainted with nature and understand the uses of trees and plants. The parents also shared their knowledge and added value to the articles. Subsequently, these articles were published in *Chakmak*, a magazine published by Eklavya, and a copy of the magazine was gifted to the children whose articles

were published.

Exposure visits

Every now and then, three parents and three children of grades 3 to 5 from each centre were taken for exposure visits to observe local industries, police stations, thermal power plants, railway stations, science centres, museums, printing press, parks, gyms, water filter plants. They also learned about local law, old local traditions and methods of electricity generation. Such visits provided an opportunity for the children to learn about things around them. The children wrote about their experiences in exposure visits.

Organising *Bal Mela*

Bal Melas were organised to demonstrate children's learning throughout the year. *Bal Mela* activities included quizzes, clay toy displays, and exhibitions of children's story-writing, painting and art. Outdoor games such as chair race, kho-kho, kabaddi etc. were organised, giving the children an opportunity to showcase their talents.

Demonstration of proficiency in mathematics

A local market was set up in the *Bal Mela*. Children 'sold' items which people 'bought' with pretend money. During the sale, children managed the shop and did money transactions.

Children and parents measured their heights and weights and calculated their body mass index. They found out who was overweight, underweight and low weight.

Community involvement

A meeting was organised with the community one evening every month. The parents, public representatives, centre operators and children attended the meeting. Parents saw the work done by their children and familiarised themselves with what they had learnt and how regular they were in attending the activities of the centre. They were informed of the names of the children with less than fifty percent attendance and efforts were made to ensure regularity by getting the co-operation of the other parents and children.

Relationship with the school

Every week a meeting of the centre operators was organised in different primary schools. Government school teachers also attended the meeting. The centre operators shared their weekly work report with everyone. The planning for the next week was also done. A mathematics paper was solved. A few

pages of one of the education related literature were read and discussed. The teachers also shared their experiences with all since they were also involved. D El Ed and B El Ed students visited these centres from time to time and were delighted to see the very principles they were studying being implemented.

Some educational institutions also came for exposure visits and they too appreciated this kind of effort and learned from it.

Parents' visits

Parents of children in centres which were not working properly were taken to centres that were functioning well so that they could see the work that was being done with the children, the participation of parents, the attendance of children, the decoration of the classroom, the learning levels and their portfolios. When they went back to the centre in their village, they tried to improve it. The centre operator was also asked to discharge his/her responsibility sincerely. To ensure active participation of the parents, they would also be taken on exposure visit of different institutions.

Looking at achievements

Baseline, midline and end line tests were conducted in the beginning, middle and end of the programme to document the changes that had taken place in the children of government schools because of the *Shiksha Protsahan Kendras*. The students of grade 3 were asked to solve a question paper in language and mathematics of grade 1 level and the changes at grade 3 level were observed.

Fifty centres were established in thirty five primary schools in Tamia and in three years about eighty five young people were trained and were able to develop an understanding of quality education in Tamia Development Block. The teachers of government schools also took the help of these youths to teach the children of their schools and they in turn helped them in learning many skills. Hence the village had a set of good resource persons who could help the children of their village, had an understanding of quality education and worked towards connecting the children with the mainstream by giving good education to the children of their families and localities.