Shiksha Protsahan Kendras - in support of learning

By | Jul 30, 2013

It was 7.00 a.m. when we boarded the jeep to Nagwada. Maheshji, who has been working with Eklavya for the past 18 years, was taking us to the Shiksha Protsahan Kendras run by Eklavya in remote villages like Nagwada and Bhanpur, in the district of Hoshangabad.

Shiksha Protsahan Kendras (SPKs) were started by Eklavya to provide out-of-school support to children going to government primary schools. Since many of them are first-generation learners, they don’t receive sufficient academic support from home to complement what they learn in school. The SPKs are a way of filling this gap by providing a learning space and a facilitator who can support the children in developing language and mathematical abilities. They also work towards improving children’s creativity by setting up children’s libraries, arranging workshops on origami, drawing, making toys with clay, wall newspapers (Bal Akbaar). These centers are set up in consultation with the community. The community provides the space for setting up the center, appoints the facilitator and participates in the day-to-day monitoring of the center (e.g. ensuring the center opens every day, children attend regularly etc). The center opens early in the morning and runs for two hours before school begins.

SPK CENTRE, NAGWADA VILLAGE

It was a fifteen minute drive along the narrow highway laid on the banks of the Narmada river after it was diverted. The huts and kuchcha houses on either side of the road clearly portrayed the conditions of the people working in the farms. After many turns, we arrived at an unassuming one-storeyed building where we were joined by Rajesh Pathak of Ganera, an SPK supervisor in charge of 4-5 centres.

The first thing that struck us was that there was not much noise, something we wouldn't associate with the presence of children. We actually wondered if there were any children inside. The reason for the silence became obvious the moment we entered the Kendra. We found children aged between 5 and 10 years, seated on ‘gunny-bag-turned-mats’ in a circle along with their facilitator. They were gazing intently at the rectangular yellow cards spread out before them.

Making sense with letters ...

The facilitator, Ram Bharosji, was sitting in the midst of the children helping them make words from the consonant cards. He showed the cards to the children and asked them to make words at random. For
example, he gave  and children made words like , , .

The exercise graduated to making words the facilitator called out. He then gave them three consonant cards and one vowel card. The children tried to make as many words as possible by trying different combinations – the probability of making many words with 3 given consonants and one vowel was brought out through this exercise. After every word, the facilitator also asked the children if the word made any sense at all. We found that the maatra cards were a little bigger than the consonant cards, and depending upon the place the maatra takes, the cards were designed to accommodate the consonant. The children formed their names from the cards and the names of their friends too. Word formation was happening very easily and those who did not know were also learning with ease.

Mathemagic ...

After the language session, Ram Bharosji declared, ‘Ab hum ganit padhenge’ and the children piled up the language cards, stacking them in order of their size and checking to see if all the cards were present before handing them to him. There was a sense of discipline and responsibility among the students enforced without sticks, stares or loud voices. The facilitator seemed to have achieved this by cultivating an interest in the children and by becoming their role model.

The children waited with eager anticipation as he pulled out the number cards. One-by-one, he gave them a number of fun-filled activities to reinforce different concepts in mathematics like number sequencing, place value, and basic operations.

He laid out cards from 11 – 20 on the floor, but deliberately left out a few numbers and asked children to identify the missing numbers. He spread out the cards of four numbers and asked the children to place the preceding and succeeding number in a number ladder. Then he distributed the 20 cards among the children, and each one had to place their card in the correct place in descending order.

The concept of place value was also reinforced with the same set of cards. Every card with a number had symbols [*] representing tens and units on the reverse side. The facilitator picked up the number 14. He placed his finger on the ‘ones’ and hid the digits (****) and asked how many are left, the children said, “10”. After this he turned the card and showed the children the side which had the number 14 written on it. He hid the number ‘4’ and asked how many left now and the children didn’t say 1 instead they said ‘10’ relating to the concept.

Next, children were given fake 10 rupee and 1 rupee notes. One of them was asked to give the facilitator 11 rupees for buying soap. The boy started counting the ‘ones’ but realized that he had only seven. After pondering for a few seconds, he promptly picked up one 10 rupees note and one 1 rupee note and handed them over to the facilitator.

It was also inspiring to see how Ram Bharosji involved everyone in the activity. He was very patient with the children giving them the space and time to learn, coaxing them, motivating them and teaching them what that might have been struggling with in school. He did not use complex jargon but simple materials and activities to develop concentration, team work, and discipline. We also learnt that the community has high respect for Ram Bharosji because of his dedication and hard work.

SPK CENTRE, BHANPUR

Our next destination was the SPK center in Bhanpur village. This centre runs out of a house given by the community for this purpose to SPK. Ushaji, the center facilitator ushered us in where a group of 20 children between ages 3-13 had huddled together.
Language and creativity...
The facilitator made the children recite the poems "Paise pas hote to, chaar chane laathe" and pointed the words on the poster put up on the wall. Children were identifying words from the poster and connecting the words with the poem they had recited. She then narrated a story from one of the book from the SPK library and directed questions at the children at random to check whether they were comprehending what was being read out.

Many other activities were used to enable language learning – arranging sentence strips in a sequence to form a story, creating stories and using them for reading, correlating the poem learnt with the words in the poem posters, etc.

Speaking with us about her experience with SPK, Ushaji said that working with SPK not only enabled her to help many children in their 'learning' journey but actually added more meaning to her own life. After her first year BA when she got married, Ushaji had felt that something was missing because she couldn’t put her education to much use, apart from teaching her own children. In 2007, when the community decided to set up an SPK in the village, she found that a new door had opened up for her and she could finally put her education to good use. She proudly showed us the different teaching-learning material she had created with support from the Eklavya team, and added that she was also working on her English speaking skills.

Behind the scenes.....
Throughout both the sessions, the SPK supervisor kept making notes and made his observations in the notebook he had brought along. A lot of systematic planning actually goes on behind the scenes to ensure the effectiveness of this model. Each Kendra maintains a record of the learning levels of each child. The volunteer plans activities for the children taking into consideration their learning levels and regularly tracks the improvement in each child’s learning levels. The supervisors play a significant role in ensuring quality work in these centres and visit the centres periodically to oversee the work, discuss any issues the facilitators may be facing and providing support where needed. They also interact with the community to get feedback on the centre and on the performance of the facilitator.

A dedicated group of people is steadily working towards better education for the most deprived – may their tribe increase!

Tags: shiksha protsahan kendra
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