

A Detailed Note on WATIS Programme Intervention in Elementary Education

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BACKGROUND

Over the past twenty six years, Eklavya's efforts towards meaningful education have aimed at creating a holistic programme that included curriculum and material development, teacher development and classroom organisation, evaluation methods, and school administration concerned with the pedagogy of a particular subject (Science, Social Science, Primary School Education or Prashika). During these efforts we had the first-hand experience of difficulties in implementing such a programme, especially the parents' resistance to it. From this was born the idea of transforming the whole school. Earlier, all our interventions had been in the government education system, but with the mushrooming up of private English medium schools offering education that left much to be desired, we felt that we should try to transform the school into a more vibrant and thinking institution.

After initial explorations with several medium-sized private schools in 2004 – 2005, we decided in 2005-2006 to focus our resources and attention on multiple schools run by a single management. The problems in dealing with different school managements left little time to concentrate on academic concerns and required more personnel. So we approached an NGO, Mahila Chetna Manch (MCM), which managed four schools (three of which we had worked with over the past three years – Seven Hills Public School, New Market, Ankur Higher Secondary School and Ankur Middle School) with the objective of making it possible for children of Class 3 and 4 employees to have a 'good' education. The management shares with Eklavya, and Wipro, their quest for providing an education that produces successful and happy adults who are capable of critical, independent thinking and creative action.. These schools had been running for 20 to 30 years, and had suffered a decline over the previous decade due to the change in educational contexts and increase in privatisation with a few elite schools coming to Bhopal and making the student and teacher market very volatile. The organization had begun to explore means of enhancing the image of their schools, improving the quality of educational processes with a view to give the schools the academic edge they needed in the current social and economic contexts. The school management had been open to suggestions for improvement and had promoted initiatives to enhance the quality of education in the primary section and to provide an English speaking course for the teachers. MCM, though still firm in its aim of working for the less privileged children, was hampered in its efforts by the fact that the paying

capacity of Class 3 and 4 employees was rather limited. As the fee-level was low, the schools were finding it hard to sustain themselves, despite the fact that they were all housed in government buildings. At this stage, MCM entered into a collaboration with Eklavya for two Seven Hills Schools in 2004 and for one Seven Hill School and two Ankur Schools in 2005. Their main objectives were to bring about the desired transformation in the schools and to document the process so that other similar schools could learn from our experiences. This required 'the whole school', including the teachers, students, parents, principals, management, and non-teaching staff, to become involved in and contribute to the changes.

It has been, since then, a mutually rich and fulfilling experience for the schools as well as Eklavya, even though they had to grapple with several problems that cropped up in the process. Last year, when we measured our progress against the initial goals, we realized that the feasible aim would have to be school development rather than whole school transformation. We have consolidated our efforts accordingly, though it has taken a long while and not all areas have yielded success. We have endeavoured to orient the teachers in new pedagogies, and deepen their understanding of the subjects so that curricular instruction would produce better results. We have also tried to help in developing a more meaningful academic programme, selecting text books, evaluating students' performance, and convincing parents of the need for innovation and change through sustained interaction with them.

The approach has been to explore the transformation process in schools by initiating pedagogical changes involving intensive work with teachers. The first phase of the effort was extended by one year which concluded with the end of the 2007 – 2008 academic session. The main focus during this period was limited to the pre-primary and primary sections up to Class IV. However, in the last year our help was sought, and was provided, for facilitating students of classes V to VIII in English. During this journey, we have been exploring various questions related to school changes and school effectiveness. Some of these questions are of particular concern::

- How far can a school change on its own? What kind of external support do schools need to start off?
- What larger systemic and / or cultural changes (for example in examination, textbook provision, etc.) are required for particular schools to change?
- Are there any stages or phases of change – if so what are they?
- Are there any financial, structural or systemic necessities within schools for certain kinds of changes to happen?
- What is the relationship of school-based changes and those concerned with general curriculum & material development?
- What is the role of different stake holders – teachers / principals / management / parents / external resources / students in school change?

We worked with a set of assumptions – these were:

1. Most schools in India do not clearly articulate their objectives, but given the chance, all schools would want their students to become more confident and independent learners with a clear grasp of fundamental concepts.
2. Most schools practice archaic pedagogy because they know only that.
3. That there are many reasons why they are not able to improve their functioning. External inputs can help them to understand new pedagogies and look for their own solutions.
4. School change has to happen ultimately from within the system – agencies like Eklavya can only initiate the process and help it where required.
5. School change requires continuous effort through the school year.

Though we were not able to develop a proposal for structural reform for the next phase as planned, we were able to intervene in most aspects of school development – teacher training, work with principals and management, weekly planning review and observations, assessment, setting up and working of learning centres, working on the reading process, etc.

INPUTS

Teacher Training :

There were 6 workshops held for teachers spread across the year broadly addressing aspects related to Teaching Aids, Language and Mathematics, Learning Centres and Assessment.

- A five-day workshop on Teaching Aids was held from 30 April, 2007 to 04 May, 2007 for the teachers of MCM schools as well as those from another NGO, Muskaan. This was mainly for the pre-primary and Classes I and II. Two teachers from Jingle Bells School, Faizabad assisted in the conduct of the workshop. Here the impact and necessity of appropriate teaching aids was dealt with in detail and a wide range of them were prepared and their usage demonstrated. Teachers got to prepare their own teaching aids to take with them for use in their classes.
- Another five-day workshop was held from 22 to 26 June, 2007 for the teachers of Classes III and IV addressing problem areas and the teaching-learning processes for Language and Mathematics. The Language sessions were conducted by Professor Jacob Tharu, Dr. Mukul, Priyadarshini and Anjali Noronha, while the Math sessions were conducted by Dr. Ravi Subramanian and Shweta from HBCSC Mumbai, Sabya Sachi Mitra and Dr. Jayasree Subramanian. The participants were from the MCM schools, Miti Gobind Ram and Bairahgharh, World Way School, Central School No. 2.
- A one-day workshop was held in Seven Hills Public School on 23 October, 2007 for the teachers of the MCM schools which dealt with deepening their personal understanding of the teaching-learning process, how their prescribed textbook conformed to the aims and

objectives of the National Curriculum Framework and different aspects of its implementation. A detailed report is appended – Annexure II.

- A two-day workshop was held in Seven Hills Public School on 11th and 12th January, 2008 which dealt with issues related to assessment and evaluation, and examination reform. It was well-received by the teachers and they first discussed the objectives of different forms of assessment and their practice. Next the topic of government's latest directives and their possible implementation within our schools was discussed at length, and then decisions were taken for future implementation. Actual exam papers were taken up and discussed and their evaluation was looked into. (Details in connection with concerns and the decisions taken with regard to the assessment process are given in Annexure III). A two-day workshop on the setting up, running, maintenance and uses of Learning Centres was conducted by Ruth and Dinesh Rastogi on 25th and 26th April, 2008. This was held for the teachers of the three MCM schools we worked with. As this is an important area that we have worked in, its broad details are given separately as an annexure (Annexure I).

- *In all workshops, the teachers were asked to keep their notes and write a brief report on the proceedings as part of the training. Writing is a great problem with most teachers and it takes a great deal of effort to get them to put anything down on paper.*

To ensure that the ideas introduced in the teacher workshops were implemented in the schools, an intensive and continuous system of planning and review, classroom observation, demonstration and facilitation took place in each school on a weekly basis.

Planning and Review Meetings :

Allotting time for regular planning and review on a weekly/ daily basis was attempted. This very crucial aspect was an uphill task. We only managed to get the free period and lunch time this year. Even in this limited time, almost regular inputs every week made quite a difference. The pre-primary classes had an integrated day with learning opportunities organised at the discretion of the teachers. For classes 1 to 4 weekly review and planning meetings were organised for all subjects – English, Hindi, Maths and EVS. For classes 6 to 8 there was a demand for working on English so we helped the teachers wherever possible.

Classroom Observation :

Intensive observation of the classroom teaching in all the schools was undertaken in all classes from Nursery to class 4, because the teachers required continuous support to implement the

changes suggested in teaching- learning processes and also to see what problems emerged during implementation and to solve those problems.. Equally important was oral and written feedback to the concerned teacher of his/ her effectiveness in the classroom and discussion as well as personal development in areas required. To monitor this, a checklist for observation of classroom development was drawn up for the different levels – pre-primary, Classes I, II and Classes III, IV. (Annexure IV) A weekly observation of each teacher and each class was done throughout the year. Some observations were missed during term and final exams and school events.

Demonstration and Facilitation : Many a time, the teacher was not clear how to implement what was planned during the planning meeting and requested the Eklavya person to give a demonstration or to help facilitate while the teacher taught. During this year such demonstrations and facilitations took place in each class once or twice a month.

Reading Process :

The development of oral and written language in children from Nursery to class 4 through experiences in the learning centres, storytelling, discussions, blackboard writing, emergent literacy, mini phonics lessons, in both Hindi and English has been an exhilarating experience. Through intensive support to the teachers, we were able to establish a routine comprising storytelling and reading (use of library books), discussions, children's dictations and illustrations, writing words expressed by children on the blackboard (blackboard writing) and drawing the sounds and symbols from these (phonics), and regular time in which children work in different learning centres and interact with each other. The effect of this kind of a rubric of activities bore fruit by KG II when children began to read – more in Hindi but also in English.

In classes 3 & 4 the discussions and activities were transformed into writing by children and their confidence in expressing themselves in their own words grew.

Library books were used right from the nursery in both Hindi and English to enrich the child's experience and classroom environment. Carefully selected books for different age groups were used in a variety of activities.

A detailed documentation of this process will be instituted during the next session.