

Insights from a SSA Training Programme

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All the teachers of government schools are given a 6-day training by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) so that the teachers can be made aware of certain issues related to education such as CCE, improvement in the results of examinations and effective classroom teaching. After getting a job in government service from an aided education institution, I too got the opportunity to participate in a training programme conducted by SSA. I was attending this for the first time although I had been a part of many training programmes in Vidya Bhawan during my 14-year tenure. With the same perception of training in mind, I came to SSA training programme with a lot of enthusiasm.

The training lasted for six days, in which the participants were supposed to work on two subjects – Mathematics and English. Three days were allotted for each subject. On the first day, half of the time was spent in reaching the venue and getting the registration and other formalities done. Then the discussion started on Mathematics and the Master Trainer (MT) asked us to share our problems. The teachers came up with their problems, which ranged from fractions, statement sums and writing the numbers. But no one had the solutions to these problems. Every year such problems are put forth in the training but they do not get resolved. Teachers are unable to understand how to teach these concepts. All the teachers wished that the Trainer should take the discussions forward so that some solution may emerge. But he could not do it since he had no experience of these classes and also he had not seen the textbooks of classes 1 to 5. So he was unable to discuss the issues related to this topic. He then asked the teachers to share their teaching experience and the methodologies they adopted which enabled children to do sums correctly. The ball was in teachers' court again. Most of their experiences pointed towards making the children mug up things somehow, remember it for some time and teach it again the following year. On the whole, the entire discussion was of no use and the MT was not able to facilitate the whole process properly.

No solid work was done in the next two days on mathematics. As a part of group activity, two to three teachers got together and prepared a chart and wrote down their ideas, while others were busy in completing their own chores. The charts were simply placed without any presentation, question-answer session or discussion.

When it came to filling up the CCE diary, the time was spent in the similar manner. It appeared that the MT was not very familiar with the CCE diary. All the details were taken from the teachers who had been filling this diary since previous year. Even they could not answer all the questions. For example, how will you write the lesson plans for the groups that you have made in your class, how will you evaluate the children of the different groups, will you prepare different question papers or whether the same paper will have the questions of all the levels etc. The teachers looked quite confused with the diary activity. They were also unhappy because they did not understand anything in the training. There were no takeaways for the math teachers as they did not get any new ideas either to bring a change in their class or to teach the children.

The next three days were meant for English. This subject was new to me also. I had several questions in my mind and wanted to find their answers. After the introductory session, the MT started talking and I realised that the problem of English was more alarming. Most of the teachers felt that it was very difficult to teach English to children because they did not know how to read and write English. The MT asked teachers to provide solution to this problem. All of them emphasised the need to learn the spellings of the words. My question was whether learning the spellings would help the children to read and write faster. There was silence. Some teachers shook their heads, some said that children do not learn the spelling and that is the problem.

The questions were bouncing in my mind again. I told the MT that there are certain activities that help in teaching a language which can be done before teaching reading and writing. On hearing this, one teacher said that in learning language it is very important to do speaking and listening activities with the children. The MT agreed and discussed how the teachers should also try to speak simple English sentences with the children in the class which would help in learning to read. Here again the teachers did not show any interest in the group work. They simply copied a few things from the textbook and made charts. There was no serious presentation or discussion on them.

The plight of CCE diary was no different because the teachers could not understand the plans of different groups in English subject. So they took a completed diary of one of the teachers and just got it photocopied.

In this way the teachers continued to find ways by which they could go back to school and do their job easily.

In the end when they were asked to give suggestions, they said that there is no point in giving suggestions because nobody pays any attention to them and there is no improvement in the way a training program is conducted. They said that they have been attending these training programmes for the past few years where they only waste six days. They are not benefited in terms of improving their teaching. So the training ended with mutual accusations.

I went back to school and asked the science teacher (II grade) about her training experience. She said it was fine and that they learnt about how to intensify the involvement of children while teaching in the classroom which was a very good thing. I asked about the venue of the training and was told that it was held in Vidya Bhavan. Some master trainers were from government school while the others were from Vidya Bhavan. So there was a partnership of government and private institutions. The science teacher also said that the Master Trainer of Vidya Bhavan even taught a lesson from the textbook to give the teachers a demonstration.

Now I want to highlight a few important things that are done in the training sessions conducted by non-government educational institutions. The trainers of these institutions make a complete plan before the training starts with details of how many sessions would be there and what points would be discussed in them. Throughout the training, there are open discussions in all the sessions in which the teachers also voice their problems, experiences and opinions. The group work is also done sincerely, presented before the participants and all the groups share their ideas. Further, articles related to education written by good authors are given which help in understanding various dimensions of pedagogy. Though the teachers felt bad to attending the training programme during summer holidays, after the training they felt that they were benefited and it was not a waste of time. They realised that the training was worthwhile.

According to my understanding, the difference between training given by a private institution and a Government (SSA) institution is that the trainers of private institutions were more serious, would listen to teachers and came fully prepared.

So why not the Government MT also do their jobs more seriously and with more preparedness?

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