

EKLAVYA સરી

EKLAVYA EDUCATION FOUNDATION
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Dedicated to

Teachers, Principals and School Managements

**who strive endlessly to make the teaching-learning process
a joyous endeavour**

**their endless strive neither expects nor awaits an applause
the only reward is the smile on the face of the student**

Preface

स्री is an ancient Sanskrit word meaning 'pravahati' or 'flowing'. Pravahati is more evocative than its English translation 'flowing'. Pravahati evokes images of - abundance, richness in diversity, dancing gaily as it flows, giving khulle dil se, bringing bounty and happiness wherever it goes, eager to reach out and share and belief that by sharing we actually grow. Eklavya स्री is that sharing from Eklavya School.

Before setting up Eklavya, we visited about 150 schools and colleges in seven countries, all with a basic question - what is a school; and then about 300 other small-small questions like what is the height of students in different classes (so we can design staircases, urinals, shelf-heights). We met the Director/ Principal, we brainstormed with the teachers, attended classes, slept in the hostels sometimes, etc. After starting Eklavya, we continued sending educators to other schools (typically for a week) to expose them to best practices. In many schools our educators were welcomed, allowed to attend classes, visit the library, etc.

In the last twelve years, Eklavya has welcomed schools from Jalandhar to Kakinada and Porbandar to Aligarh to come and visit. This has been a very enriching experience for both teams. They typically stay with us for three to five days and observe classes and the working of the school in minute detail. Sometimes they stay for a month or two. At the end of their stay they give a presentation and identify practices they will go back and implement.

In nearly all of these presentations, they request us to document our working. They say that here one actually sees all that is said happening every day. They saw ordinary people motivated into putting in extraordinary effort. We did put together some details into a power-point presentation. This presentation became bigger and bigger over time, and now this book.

In this book, we have transparently shared all that we do in great detail the process and the outcome. Here Eklavya is sharing small-small details of various aspects of running a school. Most of them are day-to-day aspects and some are conceptual or what we call

'philosophical' insights. Each individual point is called a 'सूची', eg सूची no 25. Thus, we have woven single सूचीs into the main सूची- the book. Some सूचीs are focussed towards the teacher, some for the Principal and some for the trustees or Managements. It can be said that some 'सूचीs' nourish the body of the school and some enrich its soul!

This 'giving' is offered with modesty and humility not for once assuming that what we do is considered to be the right thing. We invite the reader the teacher to write to us and share and question. Teachers will try some things we do and find out new ways of making them work. This will enrich us also.

Foreword

There are many reasons why we are honoured and happy to write this foreword. Of course the first is to see an organization that one was a part of helping start reach a level of maturity when it is able to share a long list of practices. (Though Eklavya does not call them that, many of these would, in our opinion, qualify to be called 'best practices' but more on that later). But that is not the only reason.

We often ask ourselves and others this question – "Why is it that, as a society, we are able to come up with better and cheaper models of mobile phones and even cars every few months, but are not able to improve the quality of our school education over decades?" It is a moot question and we do not claim to have the complete answer. But we believe that at least part of the answer lies in the fact that as an educational community we are not putting in as much systematic, focused and high-quality effort to solve challenging problems in education. Professional communities that build mobile phones and cars have a rich discourse – professional bodies and affiliations, research journals, certification and training programmes that get updated regularly, forums to share learnings and mechanisms to attract the best and brightest to the profession. We lack almost all of these in education. And that is where we see the compilation of 'Eklavya स्तरी' as a pioneering contribution – it will build a database of ideas that the education community can learn from, debate and add to.

Sharing what we have done or tried to do is probably the best way we can help the field develop. We often bemoan that we do not have a healthy research culture in India – painfully evident in education. But what is 'research'? Though it sounds esoteric, research is essentially 'peer review' of work done systematically. If a person working in a field discovers something interesting, the best people who can comment on it, benefit from it, disagree with it or add value to it are others who work equally deeply in that field. That is peer-review. Eklavya स्तरी presents practices, clearly listed out, to the education and larger community. Its contents will prove valuable to individuals and groups interested in starting schools. Rather than reinvent the wheel and make the same mistakes and learn, here is a useful compendium, which others can build on.

The other reason we like this collection, is that it represents a philosophy we respect greatly – 'Go deep and solve real problems'. Somebody once commented to one of us, 'but teaching 6th class children is not rocket science, is it?' We believe the appropriate response is, 'No, it's tougher!'

Figuring out the best way to make something work best in a school is not easy, and it sometimes takes many iterations and attempts. Such efforts are greatly aided by a systematic documentation of successes and failures. This often happens during the tenure of a principal, or within an individual institution - Eklavya ऋषि allows that process to happen across the entire community of schools. It allows us to ask ourselves "What is the best way of giving feedback to students after an exam? What measures have been tried, and what are the experiences? How can we improve on it? etc." School education, today, can benefit a lot from such analyses.

The spirit of sharing that this book represents is the next reason why we are impressed by it. It is not easy to give, but to give without expectation of getting something in return is truly commendable. That spirit of sharing has the power to raise the level of our system, our schools and each educational professional to greater heights – one where our schools too will earn the respect of society.

And last, but not the least – We thought that many of the ideas compiled in this collection are remarkable and deserve to be implemented across all schools! We specifically liked the idea of the Free Elective Project for students (#84) which encourage each student to take up a problem and investigate it. Such explorations at the senior school level are no less than life-shaping in a very meaningful way. The process of induction of the educators (#104) and the Educator Bag (#54), the No Tuitions policy (#131) for students and teachers, and the processes for professional development of educators (#98) are ideas that every school should probably study, and try and emulate.

Sharing one's practices always increases the pool of ideas that other institutions can pick and choose from in building their own unique cultures and ways of doing things. Sharing also brings a discipline to the documentation of processes and activities, beliefs and values. Almost all the ऋषिs are elucidated clearly. We look forward to seeing,

in the next edition, a detailed WHY behind each belief and value statement (eg, why is 100% attendance important, etc.).

We hope that all these ideas and efforts will help improve the quality of education that we provide to our children.

Sridhar Rajagopalan and Venkat Krishnan N.
Ahmedabad & Mumbai
23 November 2008

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*Educational Initiatives works with a vision to create a world where every child – across geographical and socio-economic boundaries - learns with understanding. EI's research is focused on meaningful measurement of student learning, teacher feedback based on such measurement and ways to improve the quality of student learning.
(www.ei-india.com)*

GiveIndia is one of the world's first "philanthropy exchanges" that helps individual donors choose and donate to a wide range of causes of their choice all over India, be it in education, disability, employment, children, women, rural development, environment, etc. GiveIndia expects to channel Rs28cr from more than 100,000 individual donors, to more than 150 NGOs in 2008-09. (www.giveindia.org)

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