SEEKING QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL
Experiences from the District Primary Education Programme

Occasional Papers

by

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PREFACE

The improvement of the quality of primary education is one of the important goals of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). At the heart of the programme’s change model is a vision of a more attractive, safer, better-attended school in each village in India – a school where each child learns. DPEP sought to achieve these aims by an ambitious combination of decentralised, participatory planning and decision-making, teacher training and support, qualitative improvement in school and classroom provision, infrastructural rationalisation, research, rigorous monitoring and supervision and institutional development. It sought to have an impact on primary education not only in the DPEP districts but in the non-DPEP districts too.

Over the years the programme has expanded, in a phased manner, to 275 districts in 18 states, the latest expansion having taken place very recently. In the initial 42 districts DPEP has been implemented for almost seven years and is nearing completion. Simultaneously the Central and State governments are revisiting their plans for achieving the UEE and EFA goals and preparing sector development strategies in view of the Tenth Five Year Plan. Taking stock of not only what has changed due to DPEP but also how changes take place, have a multiplying effect or get diluted, will at this stage be essential at all levels particularly as quality improvement and more effective use of available resources are the thrust of the future plans and programmes.

Rohit Dhankar, who is working with a Jaipur based NGO called Digantar, participated in the 13th joint review mission for DPEP in April 2001. Brigid Smith an independent consultant based in Cornwall, England participated in the 14th joint review mission in November 2001. The two articles brought out here were prepared in this context and views expressed are entirely those of the authors. Rohit’s article will explore the notion of quality in DPEP and efforts made to improve it, whereas Brigid’s article reflects on the efforts made to reach and retain the DPEP focus groups.

The purpose of publishing and disseminating these articles in the series of Occasional Papers is to promote and participate in the discussion on lessons learnt from DPEP – one of the most ambitious programmes of educational reform in the world. We look forward to continued collaboration in the sector and your views and reflections on changes that are underway and the potential they offer.

Mervi Karikorpi
June 2002
The notion of quality

The improvement of the quality of primary education is often mentioned as one of the important goals of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). DPEP has worked in 18 states with this agenda to improve the quality of classroom interaction and teaching-learning materials among other things. In this paper I am attempting to understand how quality is seen within DPEP and what is the nature of efforts made to improve it. This is not a study of quality in DPEP pedagogy reform drive; the paper is more in the nature of reflections on the educational thought guiding the efforts as well as the training methods used. The paper also proposes an alternative way of looking at quality and suggests a few measures that may help in crystallising the notion of quality, as well as contribute to the efforts made to realise that notion.

There are a whole lot of things, starting from the school building to programme monitoring, which could be seen as affecting the quality of a school. The purpose of this article, though, is a limited one. In order to understand one important aspect of the quality improvement drive within DPEP we shall concentrate entirely on classroom processes, textbooks and materials used, and teacher training; in other words the content and process of education. This does not mean that community involvement, monitoring, evaluation, and school buildings do not contribute to the quality of a school, but certainly, these factors are secondary to the quality of education. They are some of the means to make classroom processes ‘better’.

The DPEP Guidelines quotes from the NPE resolve “that free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality should be provided to all children up to 14 years of age…”. ¹ Guidelines is a document which sets out various programme parameters and objectives in a very general sense, and therefore, it would be unfair to expect it to dwell on defining the quality of primary education in great detail. Still a careful reading of the document reveals many valuable hints at the notion of quality assumed. One can perhaps put these hints in two broad groups: one, the objectives and targets of the programme that have a bearing on the educational practices, and two, those more specifically characterising the classroom practices.

Among the first group one finds: “improving school effectiveness; toning up teacher competence, training and motivation; stressing learning competence and achievements; stressing need for improved teaching/learning materials”; ² “enhancing school effectiveness in terms of … learning achievements”; ³ and similar objectives, all very important areas where improvement is needed. The next group provides hints to the direction in which one is advised to look for answers to the question “well, what does one do to improve school

effectiveness, enhance learning achievements, etc.?" There are many hints at preferable practices that are supposed to help and/or define the above-mentioned improvements.

Foremost among such elements of quality is a system based on Minimum Levels of Learning (MLLs). MLLs is seen as important enough to be mentioned in defining the DPEP mandate (p. 1), in convergence of various aspects of education (p. 10), as part of pedagogic training (p. 19) and target setting for activities under primary formal education (p. 23). The second important element prescribed for the system is multigrade teaching: again, mentioned in connection with convergence and as a highly recommended part of the teacher training. The system is also supposed to pay attention to lessening the academic burden (p. 10), to be gender sensitive (p. 10, 19) and to be environment sensitive (p. 19). Thus we can conclude that when DPEP Guidelines talks of quality improvement it is referring to a system which is (i) based on MLLs, (ii) encourages multigrade teaching (perhaps in order to solve the problem of having fewer teachers than number of grades in a school), (iii) is less burdensome academically, and (iv) is gender and environment sensitive.

This notion of quality in education was further crystallised by the time another document DPEP moves on… (1998) was published. DPEP moves on… states “Improvement in the quality of primary education is the core of DPEP. The key areas in which interventions have been planned and are being implemented are fostering a clear pedagogic vision of an active, child centered classroom; development of in-service teacher training which is participatory and experiential in nature and which addresses classroom issues; development of activity-oriented teaching learning material including textbooks that would help in achieving MLLs”.4 The focus on Block Resource Centres (BRCs) and Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs) is supposed to have “shifted from lecture-demonstrations to an interactive, empowering approach”.5 Further “the training programmes lay emphasis on MLLs, activity-based child-centered methods, content areas and creation and use of teaching-learning materials. Other aspects that are increasingly being made part of teacher training are gender sensitisation …”6

One notices a few new elements entering the notion of quality: activity-based teaching methods; and interactive, empowering, participatory and experiential training. There is also a mention of special issues in education of tribal children etc. but that is not at the level of the ‘quality’ of the system as gender sensitivity is. “Environment sensitive” does not find mention in DPEP moves on… but perhaps one should not make too much of it at this stage.

The stories of textbook renewal in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Assam (in the second round) are supposed to be informed by the same activity-based child-centered pedagogy to better achieve MLL. Kerala, it seems, was attempting to improve quality through MLLs based approach alone in 1995, when through the route of activity-oriented classrooms, the state discovered the full-blown child-centered pedagogy, and ended up by evolving revolutionary new textbooks; and a strategy to be followed in other states as a bonus.7 R.S. Pandey in Going to Scale with

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5 Ibid. p. 25.
6 Ibid. p. 25.
Education Reform celebrates and restates the same notion of quality.

In view of all this one can reasonably state that the official documents, training material and manuals, workshop/training dialogue and reports (as we will see in a short while), and informed writing on DPEP, all largely put forward the same notion of qualitative improvement in education. To recapitulate that agreed upon notion, a good quality education system is one that:

(i) employs child-centered, activity-based and joyful learning methods;
(ii) using, again, child-centered and activity oriented textbooks;
(iii) in multigrade/multilevel classrooms;
(iv) in order to help children attain prescribed standards as per Minimum Levels of Learning (MLLs).

The child-centeredness, in points (i) and (ii) above, is the main operative element. Activity-based and joyful learning are more of defining characteristics of child-centered pedagogy rather than independent elements of quality of the system. Using child-centered materials (whatever they might mean!) can be properly considered as part of the child-centered methods, rather than an independent element. Therefore, we have three main strands of this notion of quality: namely, child-centered methods (together with activity-based and joyful learning, of course), multilevel/multigrade teaching and MLLs. Since these three strands define this notion of quality education we can call it “Child-centered MLL-oriented” (CMO) notion of quality education. To understand this notion of quality education properly, let us look at the three defining strands more closely as they are interpreted in DPEP.

However, before embarking upon this task, we need to state that this is not the only notion of quality education in DPEP, though it certainly is the most dominant one. It also has internal variations, some closer to the child-centered and others closer to MLLs. Also there are several interpretations of child-centered education, exhibiting varying degrees of sophistication. Secondly, some DPEP states may have entertained different models, which did not have much to do either with child-centeredness or with MLLs. But most of these attempts slowly accepted the same rhetoric and became more or less indistinguishable from the CMO model, with the possible exception of Kerala. Therefore, in this article we shall mostly talk only of the CMO model.

The nature of child-centrism prescribed in the CMO model

The first and most important defining strand of the CMO model of quality education is its child-centeredness. One wonders at the sheer frequency with which the hyphenated words “child-centered” are used, not only in DPEP, but in general conversation on education in India. Almost any question about quality of education can be answered with this magic compound word. Books are very good, ‘because they are child-centered’ (or may be child-oriented). The teacher-training programme is very good, ‘because it emphasises child-centered teaching’. The programme is innovative,

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8 Robin Alexander in his paper “In pursuit of quality in elementary education: Reflections on DPEP” leaves MLLs out of the defining strands of quality education as understood in DPEP. He presents an excellent critique of the model. (Reflections on equity, quality and local planning in the District Primary Education Programme, 2001, The European Commission.)
‘because it is child-centered’. In spite of this frequent use, though, not much effort is made to clarify what “child-centeredness” is supposed to mean in all these contexts. Since there is no elaboration on, or a clear definition available (at least I have not seen one), of this magic formula as understood in DPEP, we shall have to cull-out on our own, from stray statements available in the literature, remembered discourse with DPEP personnel and general tenor of DPEP workshops. In order to capture the notion we will note: a) relevant general trends, b) notion of the child used, c) assumptions about the child’s process of learning propagated, and d) the role of the teacher, that the CMO notion of quality prescribes.

The workshops on pedagogy, textbooks, and visioning, etc. all seem to start with a discussion on the child. The various kinds of training manuals reinforce the same trend. The question posed could be as profound as “what is the child?”, “what is the view of the child taken?” or “how do you look at the child?”. This exercise of reflecting on the question seems to be meant to replace the existing notion of the child in the minds of the participants with a ‘brand new’ concept of her. “What is a child? Answers to this question determine how we are going to act in the professional capacity as a teacher”.

I am drawing attention to this innocuous looking ritual of starting with the question about the child for two reasons. One, we need to note the belief that spontaneously produced ideas about the child, her learning processes, her interests and attitudes constitute an adequate background to make all pedagogical decisions. This conveniently empowering belief reverberates throughout the DPEP discourse on pedagogy. And second, the discussion about the child is a substitute for the discussion on the meaning and the importance of education, concepts of teaching and learning, aims of education, and so on. Therefore, the act of starting with this question is more than just initiating an enquiry into the teachers’ beliefs about children. This, one notices in the literature, is an act of choice made in favour of a particular pedagogy, a direction set without examining the nature of the process of education. The case I am making is not that there should be no discussion about the child. No, how can one talk of a meaningful education without talking of the child? What I am emphasising is, that the concept of education and notion of schooling (to mention just the two) are as important in educational discourse as the notion of the child. The assumption that a few ambiguous statements about the child alone – to the exclusion of all other considerations – are enough to construct a notion of quality in education is rather naive, to say the least. We will have occasions in this paper to revert to this theme; right now the purpose is to note this trait of exclusive attention to a few chosen concepts in the CMO child-centeredness.

Now, let us have a look at the view of the child which is supposed to change the whole professional life of the teachers. The most often encountered metaphor for the child is that of a plant, “…the children are like plants that need to be nurtured with care for proper growth and development. It is our responsibility to provide them the appropriate environment. They must not be treated like empty vessels that need to be filled with knowledge”. The metaphor of the child as a plant is contrasted with the child as an empty vessel, and so far the point is well made that children should not be educated as if being filled with information and facts. But the metaphor is used for much more than just that, it leads to a view of the child’s nature, learning,

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9 Sabal, Vichar Patrak, p-a6 (A tentative English rendering from Hindi by the writer of this article).

10 Glimmer of Hope..., p.23.
and what we should do in the school, all too quick for comfort. Neither the literature, nor the state and district level pedagogy personnel seem to be aware of the limitations this metaphor of “the child as a plant” has. The idea seems to have been taken in the true child-centrist tradition, where “the idea of the child’s ‘essential nature’ is that of some kind of pattern for perfection, which is held to be present in an embryo form in the child and which will reveal itself in a developmental unfolding if only the environment and external stimulation is right”.

Problems of this metaphor emerge when it is used to characterise learning processes, and making decisions regarding what the teacher ought, or ought not to do. The plant metaphor very obviously has more than a hint of predetermined direction of growth and a blue print of an end state for every child. This seems to have been accepted. “We can not accept that the child is an empty vessel nor can we make of him exactly what we desire to make. If we could make them what we wanted, then our school would have been a factory of gods and prophets. ... nor do we want to cast all children into the same mould because we know that each child differs in his capabilities to learn, it is difficult to put a limit on the child’s capabilities to learn. … We should strive to provide equal opportunity and environment that is conducive for learning, so that children can develop in their natural way, like a plant naturally grows (develops?) if adequate air, water, compost and light are made available. We also have to create (and collect!) situations and experiences so that the child can become capable of effecting his own development.”

The blue print of development, complete with direction and scope – upper limits – seems to be predetermined. We can create the environment and wait. If we are not able to make every child a ‘god or prophet’ (read educated?) it is not our fault, he was not destined to be.

Another important characteristic of the child is that he is naturally curious and wants to learn. They are by nature “…imaginative, driven by the urge to learn new things, like to learn by doing.” And “they like to do only what interests them”; as if it could ever be otherwise for any one! This view of the child provides one with many hints on formulating ideas on how children learn. As is already mentioned, children are by nature curious, they have a craving for learning and are born with innate potential to learn. They learn on their own in the classroom and outside it. “…The child is not an empty creature, she is born with multifaceted innate capabilities, and due to gradual interaction with her environment these innate capabilities are dramatically enriched and manifested in complex forms.”

“Children imitate and use that ability in language learning.” “Children learn with different

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12 Sabal, Vichar-Patrak, p.6.
13 Sabal, Vichar-Patrak, p.6. and, of course, numerous other texts. Texts I am quoting here just happened to be with me at the moment of writing, almost all DPEP manuals would propound the same view.
14 Glimmer of Hope..., p.2; Every child in school and every child learning, p.30.
15 Chunauti, April 1999,p. 19.
16 Ibid., p.19.
17 Sabal, p.6.
speeds, they also differ in their capabilities, interests and therefore it is difficult to allot a fixed time (to learn something).”

“We should know that children have their own world, and we have to come down and enter their world.” and also that “usually the process of learning by adults and children is similar.”

This characterisation of the child, and her learning process has adequately prepared us to face the rhetorical question “now we can easily think whether it is the school which should adjust to the children or whether the children should be made to adjust to the school? Answering the question is not as important as choosing the right alternative from these two.”

This is a very important question, particularly in the DPEP context, when the pedagogical reform is in full swing. One notices that the characterisation of the child and the learning process is rather scanty, the literature of some states repeats the same five or six statements again and again; in workshops and training programmes the same statements are repeated without taking the discourse any deeper or broadening the scope. This limited characterisation of the child and learning does not really illuminate one's path as a teacher, and is grossly inadequate to make any informed choices. Thus there are two alternatives: either the child has to adjust to the school or the school to the child. It is assumed that there is some element of incompatibility and that the adjustment cannot be mutual. And finally it is assumed, that one can make the right choice without answering the question so rhetorically posed. One may wonder: If the choice is not guided by the answer to the question, then what is it that will show the right path?

The teacher is expected to stop emphasising “teaching” and bring to the centre “learning”. The dichotomy created between “teaching” and “learning” presumes certain interpretations of these concepts, and may not bear scrutiny. It is believed that the teacher should become a facilitator, stop emphasising teaching, and start facilitating. Being a friend to the children, a helper to them is considered part of being a facilitator, and being knowledgeable is considered a capacity needed for the task of facilitating. The teacher is expected to create a classroom environment, in which children learn on their own, according to their individual capabilities, and are unfolding their individual blue prints of development to the best of their capabilities.

On the face of it, this notion of child-centered education seems to have many assumptions regarding children’s learning etc. which may be justifiable and can be corroborated by research. It does emphasise sensitivity to the child’s feelings, to her ways of looking at the world, and to her ways of learning. It does advocate giving the child more freedom in the school and to make the school enjoyable. It also emphasises learning with activities, and wants to do away with rote learning. All these things are an improvement on the existing system of education and much needed reforms, which may help in improving the quality of primary education if actually brought to the schools. And yet, I would argue that the model is inadequate and perhaps is not capable of much change.

The reasons for criticising the notion of child-centeredness propagated in DPEP are as follows: One, almost all the statements about the child are presented as pure assertions. They are not supported by any evidence nor discussed in a manner to bring out their true import. That is so both in the literature as well as training and capacity building workshops. I have said in the paragraph above that some of

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18 Sabal, p.9.
19 Sabal, p.9.
20 Ibid.
21 Sadhan, p.6.
these statements may be supported by research on children’s learning, but that evidence is not shared with the teachers in a meaningful manner. As a result, these separate assertions do not form a basis in the teacher’s mind to help her in developing her own activities or programmes, nor do they accomplish this task for the trainer. They remain nuggets of received knowledge, cherished possessions in one’s verbal repertoire. Two, the assorted statements are also too superficial. If one wanted to constitute a programme on the basis of this knowledge it would be impossible. Much more information and knowledge would be needed.

Three, many of the assertions are plainly misleading. For example, “the child is like a plant to be nurtured”. Analogy and metaphors lend a narrative power to fire the imagination of the listeners. But they also have the potential to mislead or confuse the discourse. Metaphors have to be used within strictly defined parameters. Here the child as a plant is used quite freely. It is emphasised that the child can develop on her own, providing the teacher creates the right environment. This discounts the social influence on the shaping of the child. It gives an impression that the child has within her, the fully-grown human being exactly as “an oak-tree is present in embryo in an acorn.”22 This may point to the potential of the child to develop, but it also seals the child’s destiny. The shape and maximum size, besides much else, of “the oak tree” is of course already predestined. No amount of good nurturing can change that. One does not really need very sharp reasoning to understand the implications of such a theory in the context of education in a caste-ridden society. We have been hearing for generations that the caste characteristics (intelligence and satvik nature of the Brahmin, or stupidity and tamsi nature of the shudra) are innate, born with the baby. And, of course, “honhar birwan ke hot chikne paat” – the seedling that is capable of growing has shiny leaves, meaning that the gifted ones can be recognised early in life. The interpretation of the “child as a plant” metaphor with hints at its predestined nature, may turn out to be quite damaging for many of the children.23 The metaphor, of course, is patently misleading and mental development is very much a social phenomenon, and not sealed in any “acorn” with its detailed blue print.

Four, there is not much in the characterisation of the child and her learning process to warrant the conclusion that the teacher should become a facilitator. Even if one accepts the dubious claim that given the right environment the child will develop on her own, the teacher cannot abdicate her responsibility for the direction that development takes. The child’s innate capabilities make her as good a learner in caring for others, as in hating or torturing others. The child-centrist today cannot claim like Rousseau that “Let us lay it down as an incontestable maxim that the first movements of nature are always right.”24 Nor are they in a position to claim divinity in the child, like Froebel. Therefore, the teacher has to do a substantial amount of directing and pruning as well as

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22 “The perfect manhood which is present in embryo in the new-born infant, just as the oak-tree is present in embryo in the acorn, will struggle unceasingly to evolve itself.” E. Holms in What Is and What Might Be, 1911, London: Constable.

23 A trainer in a training session explained that in play girls make houses while the boys break them because the girls are destined to build homes when they grow-up. The school especially started for girl children are called “Aangan Shalas”, reflecting the deep-seated wish to keep women within the “aangan”(court-yard surrounded by four walls of the house). No wonder the metaphor of “child as a plant” has proven to be rather popular.

24 Rousseau, Emile, Book 2, page 267.
nurturing and facilitating; and has to make
decisions about what to nurture and what to
prune.

Five, in addition to being unwarranted the
depiction of the teacher as the facilitator, is
unexplained and is also minimal. It does not
provide substantial ground to run the school.
Finally, I feel that the teachers slowly become
aware of these weaknesses in the notion, and
understand it for what it is – a rhetorical notion.
Its implication for lesson plans, classroom
activities, evaluation and classroom organisation
are too nebulous and equivocal.

This use of rhetoric does bigger damage in the
Indian educational scenario than we realise in
the first instance. To understand this, imagine
yourself as a teacher in a rural Indian school,
who has seen more than a fair amount of
discrepancy between what is said, and what is
done by the school administration. Now this
teacher is given a new training, where an
inconsistent, vague notion of child-centeredness
is created. It recommends a fairly large amount
of freedom to the child, self-directed and self-
learning through activity, facilitation rather than
teaching, freedom of pace of learning to the
child, integrated learning, and so on. As a
teacher, you find it probably very different from
what you have been doing. Still you accept it,
and wonder how the school will actually run.
Then after this ‘theory’ the actual business of
the classroom teaching is discussed, and lo and
behold, the same old grades with their year-
wise packaging of curriculum re-appear (some
states that want to make progress faster,
package the curriculum even month-wise);
book-based lesson plans, where the whole-
class teaching is the norm, and pass-fail on the
basis of book-based examination remain
unaffected by the child-centered principles; the
need for every child to do what the teacher has
planned re-appear, and so on. These two sets
of recommendations are clearly at odds with
each other, but it is given to understand that the
understanding of the child, and child’s learning
processes recommends both. This will bring the
Indian teacher full circle “hathi ke dant
dikhane ke aur khane ke aur” – the elephant
has two sets of teeth, one for show and another
one to eat with. And it becomes another step
towards cynicism. A very often heard remark
in free time between the sessions of teacher
training is “yeh sab kahne kibaten hain, kam
to vaise hi chalega” – all these nice sounding
words are there to be said, however, “the work
will go on as usual”. This attitude can be
confronted only with a consistent programme,
that has very clear linkages between the
assumptions and classroom practices. Also, this
internally inconsistent child-centrism reinforces
the mistaken dichotomy between theory and
practice, so popular among the Indian
educationalists. And last but not the least, like
all child-centrist theories, this particular brand,
however shoddily constructed, also
communicates without ambiguity that exploring
concepts and the aims of education and
epistemology are useless exercises, whereas
contemplating, however incompetently, the
nature of the child is enough to build practicable
models of education. Child-centrists are, of
course, famous for being strong on methods
and weak on aims.

Multigrade/multilevel teaching as a
strategy to deal with the shortage of
teachers

The second strand in the CMO model of quality
in education is that of multigrade/multilevel
teaching. The discourse on multigrade/multilevel
is quite confusing. This is evident from the
continuous use of two words; “multigrade/
multilevel”. Most of the DPEP efforts have
been in multigrade teaching, that is, one teacher
teaching more than one grade. The need and
The rationale for multigrade teaching is either socio-political or managerial; and pedagogical considerations are only grafted on to it. There are still a big number of schools with two teachers, or even only one teacher, for five grades. In most of these schools the student teacher ratio is 60:1 or above. There is a real problem, how can one teacher teach more than one grade (two or three or even all the five) and 60 or more children at the same time? The real solution to the problem is to appoint more teachers and rectify the adverse situation. But appointing more teachers costs money. Since most of the children in these schools belong to the weaker sections of society, easier and less expensive solutions are sought. Therefore a pedagogical solution for this socio-economic problem is devised in the name of multigrade teaching strategies.

Most of the strategies devised for the so-called multigrade teaching are plainly time and space management techniques, more or less effective. They are designed to keep the children in grades, and on the given task. The idea of extending the notion to allow the child more space to work independently, and also simultaneously provide support is extremely rare. The multigrade, in DPEP, is not a desirable situation; it is a necessary evil, which is to be combated, even if willy-nilly.

The grade-less classrooms (or learning groups) where children are not segregated into homogeneous classes, but instead heterogeneous learning groups are seen as a desirable situation; it is a necessary evil, which is to be combated, even if willy-nilly.

The concept of grade involves: i) breaking down the curriculum into chunks of learning, packaged separately, ii) allotting a fixed time to master the packaged curricular content, usually one year, iii) testing either at the end of the allotted time period, or maybe several times in between,

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25 Grade-less learning groups are sometimes called “family grouping” or “vertical grouping”.

“Multilevel” is also used in DPEP to refer to a situation of teaching so called “bright” and “dull” (in spite of all the child-centrist rhetoric these notions are intact) children of the same grade together, here ‘level’ meaning the ‘level of intelligence’ of the child. To my mind it is quite a bizarre idea of “multilevel” teaching, and its simultaneous worship with the CMO brand child-centrism is an evidence of the rhetorical nature of the latter. Clearly, however forcefully one may claim this kind of understanding of multigrade/multilevel teaching as a factor in quality improvement, a closer analysis quickly reveals that the claim does not hold much water. The strategy is either used in Alternative Schooling Programmes, which are any way second rate attempts to educate poorer children and are wanting in quality, or at a few places in the learning ladder strategies. The learning ladder strategies seem to be genuine attempts at the multigrade teaching in order to give children relatively more independence in learning, though they do not go as far as questioning the idea of the grade itself.
but calculating the total score to decide eligibility or lack of it, to promote the learner to study the next curricular chunk, iv) in case of a failure, the whole chunk should be learned in the same time period (one year) again, no freedom either to re-package the curriculum in smaller chunks, nor any flexibility in the learning time allotted. Clearly though the idea of grade is basically a management-friendly idea, its pedagogical basis is rather doubtful. No serious analysis of these ideas and their pedagogical justification is deemed necessary within DPEP. The child-centered pedagogy generally encourages questioning these untenable assumptions, but not in DPEP. Therefore, there is no awareness that the freedom of the pace of learning and continuous evaluation is incompatible with the concept of grade. As the grade was used to manage children, now in a changed situation the idea of multigrade is used for the same purpose. It seems that claiming that the multilevel/multigrade is an effort for quality improvement, is nothing more than making a virtue out of an ugly necessity; ugly because the children who bear the brunt belong to the weaker sections of the society.

**MLLs as the measure of quality**

The third strand in the CMO model of quality education is better achievements in Minimum Levels of Learning (MLLs). It is perhaps clear without stating, that better achievements in a curricular scheme could now in a changed situation the idea of multigrade is used for the same purpose. It seems that claiming that the multilevel/multigrade is an effort for quality improvement, is nothing more than making a virtue out of an ugly necessity; ugly because the children who bear the brunt belong to the weaker sections of the society.

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The third strand in the CMO model of quality education is better achievements in Minimum Levels of Learning (MLLs). It is perhaps clear without stating, that better achievements in a curricular scheme could now in a changed situation the idea of multigrade is used for the same purpose. It seems that claiming that the multilevel/multigrade is an effort for quality improvement, is nothing more than making a virtue out of an ugly necessity; ugly because the children who bear the brunt belong to the weaker sections of the society.

(i) This patently behaviourist approach of measuring learning by change in observable behaviour is not defendable. Learning need not manifest itself in behaviour immediately after its occurrence. The learner, as a conscious choice maker, is not consistent with this idea; nor does a change in behaviour necessarily indicate worthwhile human learning, as human learning necessarily involves an element of understanding, and change of behaviour by conditioning may dispense with understanding,

(ii) The idea of chopping up a subject area in discrete competencies to be mastered one by one is neither epistemologically sound, nor is it supported by the theories of learning;

(iii) The presentation of MLLs creates a dichotomy between cognitive and affective domains which is hard to sustain. The idea of values without cognition, purely a caught behaviour, was abhorrent to many;

(iv) The rigidly defined competencies to be mastered within a given time (grade wise competencies) by all children is not a viable idea, nor is it desirable;

(v) The notion of competency is used as all encompassing – including values, attitudes, opinions, etc. – this will render the educational discourse poorer and after an intense campaign for implementation the only thing worth learning will remain the narrow competencies synonymous with skills bordering on plain narrow mental
gymnastics, a sort of ‘mental-dexterities’;

(vi) The MLLs as presented have no place for critical thinking, autonomy and creativity, while over emphasising so called competencies;

(vii) The aims of education as defined by the MLLs, are to make the learners useful and contributing adults rather than autonomous rational members of society, who participate in deciding the kind of society they want to make and sustain. Learners are supposed to seek fulfilment in contributing to the society without questioning its aberrations;

(viii) MLLs sees education as teaching of only 3Rs.  The arts and skills are not given any place in the curriculum.

These were some of the arguments against MLLs which are relevant to our present discussion. Ten years down the line, and after a hard campaign to implement MLLs, many of the arguments advanced against MLLs are corroborated by experience, but that is another story. The DPEP reluctantly looked at the curriculum in some states, and nowhere rigorously questioned the MLLs, perhaps with the possible exception of Kerala. The issues listed above on MLLs, raised 5-9 years back are still unanswered. Some of the characteristics of MLLs are clearly and starkly antagonistic to the child-centeredness as accepted by DPEP. All the child-centered theories have been resisting teaching, specifically to achieve narrowly defined competencies, and therefore have been resisting uniform standards. The ideas of the freedom of pace of learning, integrated teaching, giving the child space to learn on her own, teacher as a facilitator etc. all contradict MLLs approach, and still the DPEP brand of child-centeredness (nay, the Indian brand of child-centeredness) has been happily married to MLLs, and is ‘happily living ever after’. Talk of strange bedfellows!

We have tried to understand the CMO notion of quality in education and found that it hangs on the notions of the child, her learning processes, idea of multigrade/multilevel teaching and MLLs as the basis for curriculum. The discourse on the notions of the child, the child’s learning processes, and multigrade/multilevel teaching, is very scanty, not enough to empower either the teacher or the trainer, is misleading. Conclusions for the textbooks or the classroom teaching are not informed by the assertions made regarding the nature of the child, or her learning processes, and the real basis for them is not discussed or articulated. The rhetoric is on one side and the practical business of classroom teaching has its own logic, never told to the teacher or even the trainer. The positions taken on the three major issues – child-centeredness, multigrade/multilevel teaching and MLLs – contradict each other. These are the major weaknesses of the model when we analyse it from inside, that is, accepting the framework within which it operates. A critique from within can point out the problems related with consistency, veracity of claims and adequacy of assumptions made about the separate elements that constitute the model, but cannot properly highlight the inadequacy of the whole model as a framework to guide educational endeavour. That is what we shall turn to now.

Inadequacy of the framework

We noticed that a few sketchy remarks made about the nature of the child, and another equally sparse set of commonplace remarks about the learning process, lead to the point where one is

26 3 Rs = reading, writing and arithmetic.
to decide about the kind of school that would be suitable for the children. Apart from the facile nature of the comments, what is noteworthy here is the idea communicated, that the only relevant considerations to decide about the school organisation and role of the teacher, are the child’s interests, what she likes and dislikes, how she learns through play and how curious and eager she is to learn. The model does not seem to be aware that it is theoretically possible to agree, for example, that children enjoy running around and cannot sit still, and still hold that precisely that’s why in school one must insist on making them sit still and concentrate on work; as children have to be prepared for life, and as life often demands self-discipline to curb your own inclinations of the moment in your own long term interest. To counter this argument, which is so common among north Indian school teachers, one has to bring in more psychology and claim that running about and playing in the early years prepare a child for a better disciplined life when she grows up. This line has two problems: one, it may not have reliable empirical evidence; and two, even if it does, the value of play is not established on its own intrinsic worth, but on the basis of a tool to produce better discipline. Therefore, the play has only an instrumental value. The fulcrum of the decision, to let the children play and run about, is not the child’s nature here, nor is it better learning, but the cherished value of discipline. A second line could be to maintain that even if the children need discipline, it is ethically wrong to make children sit still, as it makes them unhappy. This line of argument can be advanced only if ‘making children unhappy’ is accepted to be ethically wrong, again the fulcrum of decision is passed on to an ethical value from an assumed psychological fact. A third line often advanced is that as ‘one can take the horse to the water but cannot make it drink’ a teacher can make the children sit still, but cannot make them learn without their voluntary co-operation. This argument makes sense only if learning is accepted as the most important value, at least in this context. Confronted with a question like “why learning should be considered more important than disciplining?”, one has to again take recourse to some ethical values and no amount of description of the child’s nature and ways of learning alone would suffice. From these examples one can say, at least prima facie, that assumptions regarding the child’s nature and the learning process are descriptive in nature and therefore, alone are not sufficient to make educational decisions about the kind of school and other educational processes one must opt for.

Deliberations on the curriculum have been rather limited in the whole effort for quality improvement. The action has been concentrated on training at various levels and textbook renewal. Even where the curriculum became a subject of deliberations the exercise was limited to seeing whether it is too difficult for the child. “Rather than develop the curriculum from scratch, the route adopted was that of reviewing the existing curriculum, and using this review as a basis to evolve the new curriculum. This included identifying current difficulties faced by children and teachers, the vision of the team identifying common beliefs and assumptions, sharing concern about the MLLs, and using this to draw implications as well as a common frame of reference against which the

27 “Interests” of the children is much used word in the child-centrist discourse. But generally no attention is paid to the fact that it may have two meanings; one, that in which the children are interested at a particular moment, inclined to do etc.; and two, that what is in children’s interest, that is good for them. Children are not always ‘interested in’ what is ‘in their own interest’.
This seems to be a typical statement describing the curriculum renewal process. The only substantial action it communicates is “included identifying current difficulties faced by children and teachers”. The reference to a vision of the team, common beliefs and assumptions, concerns with MLLs etc. are mentioned several times in various documents, but what these beliefs and assumptions were is not very clear, unless they are the kind of beliefs and assumptions, captured from several sources in the earlier sections of this article, and which are shown to be inadequate. It seems the question of what should be taught, is solely decided on the considerations of what is difficult and what is not, coupled with the views about the child and her learning. If that has been the case, as it seems very probable from the study of available documents and training material, clearly it is a grossly inadequate framework of ideas to temper with any curriculum. Nowhere does one find any serious and substantiated mention of the concept of education, school, desirable society and aims of education. Similarly the considerations of the nature of knowledge, its formation, its validity and organisation into subject areas are as good an anathema as the first set of concepts. The result is that the philosophy of education – concept of education, aims, relationship with society, human nature and epistemology, at the least – has no role to play in the CMO model of the quality of education.

Primary education is seen to be equivalent to the teaching of Language, Mathematics and Environmental Studies (EVS). In spite of all the child-centeredness and praise of holistic education, no systematic attempt of the child’s aesthetic development and exploring holistic skills (working with hands, manipulating material in desired forms) is deemed necessary. This narrowing of educational vision, to my mind, an immediate fallout of jettisoning the philosophy of education in favour of sentimental psychology, of substituting human nature with the nature of the child, of exclusively concentrating on the nature of the child’s learning in preference to the nature of human learning and epistemology.

Another unfortunate impact, the disregard of philosophical considerations has on any framework of education, is that it becomes impossible to justify the framework on publicly acceptable criteria. Because the criteria, ultimately, is to do with socially acceptable values and psychological descriptions of what “is the case” it cannot lead to what “ought to be the case”. As a result such models rely on either authority – be it that of documents, or persons – or on rhetoric and sentimental appeal. Both these modes of convincing others are antithetical to critical thinking and, therefore, to empowerment. Independent development in the profession through these methods become very doubtful. We shall revert back to this issue when we discuss the mode of communicating the CMO notion of quality.

So far we have looked closely at the notion of quality we called the CMO notion. This notion assumes a framework of assumptions and

28 Subir Shukla, Where angels feared to tread, in Reflections on Equity, quality and local planning in the District Primary Education Programme, 2001, The European Commission. (Emphasis in the text is mine).

29 Where angels feared to tread, Subir Shukla; Systems in Transition, Subir Shukla; Glimmer of hope; Going to scale with Education Reform, Raghaw Pandey.

30 In future I will use philosophy of education to indicate considerations regarding human nature, desirable society, concept of education, aims of education, nature of knowledge; organisation, formation and validation of knowledge; and similar issues.
beliefs, and we have tried to point out certain problems this notion and the assumed framework seem to have. This rather forthright critique is guided by the belief—hopefully well founded—that though a theoretically sound framework, is no guarantee of success in the field, a theoretically unsound framework is bound to hamper success. If that were true, DPEP would do well to re-examine its basic assumptions regarding both education and quality in education.

The nature of attempts made to communicate the idea of quality and some of the fallouts

In this section we shall try to understand the attempts made to make the CMO notion of quality operational. We are concerned here with only those attempts that are in the form of capacity building, training, and preparation for pedagogical inputs at various levels, or teacher training.

A pedagogical reform programme would necessarily involve a shift in certain key ideas concerning teaching, learning, material used and so on. Without bringing about such a shift in ideas and attitudes, the change in the behaviour of the teacher in interaction with the child would be a worthless change. Developing new books, and using them in classrooms with a changed pedagogy requires a lot of churning, thrashing out of ideas, opportunities for discourse and dialogue, and communication at a huge scale. DPEP did open up a dialogue on methods in primary education throughout the nation. It never dared ask any serious questions about the purpose and worth of the education being made available, but how to apply that education certainly emerged as its central agenda. A large number of teachers and other functionaries of the educational sector were almost forcibly woken-up to questions about how best to teach, how best to run one’s school, and so on. This must be registered as a gain.

Another large-scale shift in attitudes and functioning is visible in the idea of the participatory nature of the training and workshops. For the present, if we leave aside the effectiveness and quality of the participation, and concentrate only on the verbal acceptance of the idea, there is a major shift that is clearly discernible in any discourse on primary education. Again, accepting teachers as active partners in planning and thinking about primary education is a big gain in a highly stratified society where authority has always demanded unquestioning obedience. Though the depth and genuineness of this acceptance of the teacher as a partner is doubtful, the verbal acceptance is certainly there. The most encouraging of these changes is the acceptance of the teacher as a textbook writer. However we should remember that there is also a counter current, constantly diminishing the stature of the teacher by creating a spurious acceptance for the ill-paid and unprepared para-teacher.

The idea of constant academic support to the teacher and of teachers’ forums engaged in pedagogical discourse to understand and solve their own problems have been popularised on a large scale. Almost all the states now have BRCs and CRCs. The BRC and CRC are very potent ideas in terms of identifying pedagogical problems, sharply defining them and finding contextual solutions. The centres have the potential to become hubs of activity and centres of generating new knowledge on effective pedagogy.

The three above mentioned examples are a
pointer to the vast amount of communication that has taken place. The chief vehicle of pedagogical and other reformatory ideas in DPEP has been the workshops, especially among the educational functionaries. It would be very useful for the purpose of the theme we are pursuing here to understand how these workshops function and communicate ideas. I propose to look at these workshops from three standpoints and call them simply:

Shepherd

- Can walk throughout the day.
- Fully indulges in crying, singing, skipping.
- Takes important decisions.
- Role in community.
- Self confidence.

School Student

- Keeps on sitting at one place.
- Has to remain quiet.
- Dependent.
- The belief that they cannot learn.

method, content and consequences. I will do it though in a rather integrated manner, where we will have the freedom to hop from the method to consequences and from there on to content, in any which way.

What we are analysing here is representative of the majority of workshops organised under various DPEP drives. I am sure there have been workshops that may be very different from what we are analysing below. This paper does not claim to have studied all kinds of workshops, but I think there must be a really very small number of those different ones, the dominant majority is taken care of here.

Let us take a quick look inside a workshop: The resource person “enquired from the teachers about the problems faced by them while teaching Class I. Everyone held that the child does not remain seated, does not express, does not take interest in school activities and so on.” The resource person “compared the circumstances of the shepherd and the school student and centered his discussion on the issue of usefulness/ineffectiveness of the school and the atmosphere of learning. Accordingly a chart was divided in two parts—one for the shepherd and the other for school students and a comparison of circumstances of both was attempted in the manner depicted in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shepherd</th>
<th>School Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can walk throughout the day.</td>
<td>Keeps on sitting at one place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully indulges in crying, singing, skipping.</td>
<td>Has to remain quiet.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Takes important decisions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role in community.</td>
<td>Dependent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self confidence.</td>
<td>The belief that they cannot learn.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

“Then why should we send children to school? The education provided today does not make him free like a shepherd; it makes him dependent, the main reason being that there is something lacking in the education, which makes the child a passive listener. Consequently it was unanimously decided that education should be such that it may enable the child to think independently and take interest in her studies. For this purpose, it is essential that textbooks should be written by persons having an experience of teaching the class and are aware of the real needs of the child.”31

Before we start learning lessons from this let us look into another workshop: The objective of this workshop was to develop a vision of what would be taught to the children. One of the critical areas explored was that of how children

learn in school and in surroundings outside the school. It was concluded that the school imposed certain boundaries within which a child is given opportunities to learn whereas the child outside the school learns on his/her own terms, free of any pressure.

Their process of learning can be explained as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning at school ……characterised by</th>
<th>Learning outside school …characterised by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Fearlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certain impositions</td>
<td>No impositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of freedom</td>
<td>Complete freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defined space of learning</td>
<td>Spontaneity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardised instructional content</td>
<td>Selectiveness, choice and preference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Obviously, learning outside the school is more fun and relaxed and allows the child to learn selectively and at a pace that suits the child. The question is … can we incorporate these positive elements of learning into the conditions of learning within the school? Will it be possible to allow the children to play, enjoy their freedom, enable them to spontaneously participate in classroom practices, narrow the distance between the teacher and the taught, and ensure that their levels of learning are not adversely affected. If all these are among those desired, there would have to be a clear understanding of the changes the existing system would have to undergo.”

If we want to understand the methodology employed in developing educational understanding in the CMO model of quality we need to analyse these two descriptions of participatory and experiential workshops. The first thing one notices is the string of unfounded claims of dubious educational worth as shown in both the tables. One wonders if any empirical study will corroborate these selective comments. And even if they were true, do they warrant the conclusion that there is serious doubt whether we should send the child to school, rhetorically expressed as a question? Then one stumbles upon a major conclusion about who should be writing the textbooks. The belief that the textbooks will cure all ills would be almost touching if the logic had not been criminally faulty. It is nobody’s case that the textbook should not be written by persons having experience of teaching and who are “aware of the real needs of the child.”

There could be umteen good reasons to uphold the claim and they could be presented in as many ways. What is being said here is that the chain of reasoning from the shepherd to the ‘teacher as the textbook writer’ does not hold water, is misleading and communicates to the participants that anything could be deduced from anything (teaching people to disregard reasoning is the first step to making a religion out of pedagogy). Putting together a string of statements, which are logically unconnected, does not form an argument, even if the statements happen to be prima facie acceptable. It is worth putting this pattern neatly together because it is so often used in workshops:

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The real needs concept is extremely ambiguous. What are the criteria to declare something a need? What is the basis of a teacher’s claim to better understand those needs? Any way what those needs happen to be?
What is being claimed here is not that the presentation of every new idea follows the same pattern, it is only that some similar pattern is followed. Some task, which looks obliquely related to a question, is presented. A lively discussion is generated (lively need not necessarily mean focused, connected, rigorous, or informed), participation is ensured, and the consensus arrived at is summed up by the resource person. The impression retained by every one is that of discussion and some might get a feeling that they have contributed to the final conclusion. What actually happens is that their statements happened to serve as props to the predetermined conclusions. (See Appendix 1). That is why workshops held at different places, at different times, reach the same conclusion, almost verbatim. How uninformed, scattered and misleading these discussions could be is shown by the two examples above. If this criticism seems too harsh one should see the understanding of the child, learning, subject areas and various other concept papers generated through this process.

The idea of school is disposed off in these examples with a few remarks, the nature of learning outside the school is established to be superior and preferable in comparison to that in the school, and therefore, the need to change the school to suit this new thinking is established; though there is not a ghost of reasonable warrant for these conclusions. Just to have a glimpse of what is so lightly discredited let us see what Michel Oakeshott has to say about school. “The idea ‘school’ is, in the first place, that of a serious and orderly initiation into an intellectual, moral and emotional inheritance; an initiation designed for children who are ready to embark on it. Superimposed on these chance encounters with fragments of understanding, these moments of unlooked-for enlightenment and those answers are imperfectly understood because they are answers to unasked questions, there is a considered curriculum of learning to direct and contain the thoughts of the learner, to focus his attention and to provoke him to distinguish and to discriminate. ‘School’ is the recognition that the first and most
important step in education is to become aware that ‘learning’ is not a ‘seamless robe’, that possibilities are not limitless.”

“Secondly, it is an engagement to learn by study. This is a difficult undertaking; it calls for effort. Whereas playful occupations are broken off whenever they have provided immediate satisfaction, learning is a task to be persevered with. What is learned has to be both understood and remembered. It is in this perseverance, this discipline of inclination, that the indispensable habits of attention, concentration, patience, exactitude, courage and intellectual honesty are acquired, and the learner comes to recognise that difficulties are to be surmounted, not evaded.”34 Yes, one may discard the view argued for by Oakeshott, but it deserves more serious thought before being discarded.

Numerous workshops have been conducted in DPEP; thousands of educational personnel and hundreds of thousands of teachers have participated in them. Certainly there are implications of all this for teacher training and how the teachers function in a classroom. Since the workshops have been the predominant mode of capacity building the whole exercise has also propagated a certain view of capacity building itself, some important features of this view are described below.

One, it seems that the workshop has been accepted as the major source of new activities, knowledge and understanding useful in primary education. The workshop is expected to be participatory and, of course, like the classroom, activity-based and enjoyable. The resource person is responsible for making the workshop enjoyable, he/she is expected to motivate, hold participants’ attention and cull out digestible nuggets of knowledge from the ‘lively’ discussion he/she is supposed to be able to generate.

Two, a good discussion is the lively one. A discussion is supposed to be lively when people speak with gusto and many want to speak (do not get into the impression that really “everyone” participates with the required gusto, even if the reports say that repeatedly). Other measures of qualities of a discussion – for example, focussed, connected in terms of linkages between what the participants are saying, logically rigorous, etc. – are not important. If you ask people to keep to the point, you are curtailing their freedom and are against participatory mode. If you insist upon understanding the argument’s validity you are hair splitting, which is a horrendous activity without any merit as far as primary education is concerned.

Three, serious reading on the concept of education, teaching, learning, the child, ways of learning etc. is useless, the educational best sellers express the whole truth in a much better fashion. Anyway reading makes one become bookish and too theoretical. Theory, as is well known, has got nothing to do with good practice.

Four, the workshop mode has developed a whole epistemology of its own. In this epistemology all knowledge is “within”, certainly within the group in the workshop. It is articulated through discussion. What the resource person summarises is the unanimous view (only if the resource person has proved his/her credentials by adhering to rules outlined in point two above), even

if he/she selects only what suits his/her purpose. What is unanimously agreed upon is the truth.

All this is especially clear in the concept of visioning. The educational vision of an individual is a result of her total understanding. It develops over a period of time, normally long drawn, as it has to encompass the totality of human life, desirable as well as situated in less than satisfactory conditions. It involves her entire value structure and understanding. In this perspective what sense does the act of “visioning” here and now make? Is it “imagining”? Or is it a serious analysis of ones own beliefs and assumptions about life to actively construct a vision of education consistent with them? It is extremely unrealistic, to say the least, to believe that people can articulate succinctly their own deepest assumptions and can immediately use them to ‘envision visions’ of education in conjunction with others. Yes, development of a shared understanding of the world as well as of education can be started, a beginning could be made, and questions could be raised. But a visioning workshop communicates much more. It makes visioning almost a playful activity that dispenses with all toil and sweat, and still produces a brand new shining vision, and shared by all on top of that. The narrow range of questions posed to formulate vision and the kind of conclusions reached bear out the above analysis.

The four points made above describe a generalised, ‘culled-out workshop’. Such workshops become a mechanism of certifying certain opinions as valid knowledge without rigorous examination. They produce a false confidence and do not enhance reflection. The propagated pedagogy becomes a dogma. This creates an increasing demand for more of the same, more activities which could be handed down to the teacher, more tricks of the trade to be used in the teacher training, and so on. This demand for more activities and workshop methods could be easily mistaken for a hunger for knowledge.

This is not particularly a problem of DPEP capacity building alone though. The workshop mode of capacity building, in the absence of other opportunities of sustained study and of good literature on education, would always push towards simplistic and easily marketable packages of educational understanding and capabilities. This coupled with the pressure of time and huge coverage in the project mode leaves little room for something more serious and relatively better grounded in the educational knowledge base. Also, we must note that, most of the resource persons do not use this epistemology deliberately to raise unfounded opinions to the status of sacred knowledge in corroboration with a community of educators. It is the dynamics of the methods which leads them into the trap, often without their conscious knowledge. It takes withdrawing and brooding to notice the pattern. The important question however is: Can the situation be turned into one where better-informed decision-making becomes a norm and the teacher starts thinking independently? I tend to believe it is not only possible but that the work already accomplished can be used to advantage. This we will explore in the final section of this paper.

An alternative framework for quality of education

Every notion of quality of education assumes a conceptual framework within which we deliberate on various issues concerning practical and theoretical problems and justify the decisions we make. When we talk of quality without talking of that framework, it is either unfounded assertions or we assume a shared
framework. Since I want to avoid making unfounded assertions and am not sure of an agreement about a shared framework, I better start by presenting briefly the framework I will be using. I assume that an education system can be adequately characterised by a framework of the following interrelated components:

1. Aims,
2. Curriculum,
3. Pedagogy (in the sense of methodology) and material,
4. School organisation, relationships (ambience), and
5. Evaluation.

Each one of these components needs a bit of explanation as to what they mean in this framework.

1. Aims: “Any education system will have aims of some kind even if they are concealed and/or implicit. “A society that fails to articulate or even be clear about the aims of its education system will most likely enjoy a second-rate one, because some of the most substantial interests in society will not have a chance to articulate what they want from education, thus losing the chance that their interests will be represented, leading to a danger of disillusionment and contempt for the institution of education itself. The formulation of the aims of the public education system is, therefore, a vital task for any democratic society which aims to have an effective education system that commands the confidence of all sections of society.”35 It is necessary to have unambiguous aims to make meaningful decisions regarding curriculum, pedagogy and so on. It is hardly imaginable to have an education system without aims. And still, as we saw, the CMO model of quality has no use for them. How, then, are the decisions made, without the direction of aims being available? Actually the direction is always there, what is avoided is the articulation and critical examination of it. Dearden explains, (interestingly in connection with the child-centered tradition). “The implicit structure of the evasion is this: (i) leave alone any attempt to thoroughly discuss aims you have in mind; (ii) at a more concrete level, enter into discourse which can in fact be engaged in only if your aims are already tacitly presupposed; (iii) then everyone will be so absorbed in the detail as not to notice the overall direction in which you are going.”36 Articulation of aims is strongly influenced by the notion of human beings we have, the kind of society we want to live in, socio-political views we subscribe to, our culture, value system, and similar considerations. How children learn and how much they can learn at what age are not really important considerations at this stage.

2. Curriculum: Curriculum as used in this framework has two closely connected but conceptually distinguishable components; one, the objectives – stage specific and keeping the direction aligned with aims; and two, the content of education – that which is to be learned – abilities, skills, concepts, facts; or say, knowledge, skills, values and ways of knowledge construction. This is what we are supposed to teach the children in order that they may realise the general aims of education. The curricular objectives are governed by three kinds of considerations: one, the aims of education; two, epistemological considerations like what part of knowledge is of a more fundamental and generic nature, and how the curriculum should be organised; and three, how


much children can learn at what age. The curriculum content is guided by the objectives, epistemological considerations and developmental curve of children’s abilities and interests, and the child’s context; not necessarily in that order.

3. Pedagogy and material: Pedagogy sometimes is used in a very broad sense to encompass the whole theory and practice of education. Here I am using the term in a rather narrower avatar, meaning the science of teaching, the teaching methodology in more day-to-day language. The aims and curriculum define what is to be taught and for what purpose, the pedagogy is to inform on how to teach. Pedagogy has to conform to the aims and the curriculum, and is informed by the theories of learning, child development, the child’s context and the child’s interests. As is obvious by now, the CMO notion of quality is aware of educational issues from here onwards while it ignores the earlier two points completely. The teaching-learning material, logically speaking, is more of a part of the pedagogy than curriculum, unless the term curriculum is used in the sense of total experience provided in the school (which is not the sense here). In that case all other categories listed here except aims become sub-categories of the curriculum. In the present framework, the teaching-learning material is seen essentially as part of pedagogy.

4. School organisation: School organisation includes wide ranging decisions regarding having or doing away with grades, distribution of workload among the teachers, distribution of responsibilities regarding various infrastructural facilities, and so on. Obviously the school organisation has to meet the demands of the pedagogy.

5. Relationships: Relationships here are meant to be relationships between the teacher and the taught, between the children, with the community and so on. Relationships in the school are governed by the nature of educational endeavour. Here the teacher, children and the community are not just members of a society and persons in their own right. They are bound to each other by a common endeavour of imparting education to the children and, therefore, these relationships are governed by the cherished ideals and values of that endeavour.

6. Evaluation: A constantly alert system that keeps track of children’s learning as well as the functioning of various systems. The methods of evaluation have to conform to the aims, curriculum and pedagogy, and not otherwise. Giving evaluation priority over the pedagogy and curriculum is a sure way of wagging the dog by the tail.

This framework could be used for educational decision-making as well as for developing a notion of quality. At the first glance it may look simplistic, that is partly due to lack of space and partly deliberate. A teacher can start using this framework to improve, or even to design his school from the very beginning. As the needs become more complex, knowledge more advanced and understanding more sophisticated, the framework unfurls itself and can become more sophisticated; one, through developing subcategories, and two, by enriching the network of interrelationships between the various elements.

The positions we take on aims of education, curriculum, pedagogy, etc. depend on values we cherish, and beliefs and assumptions we accept. These values, beliefs and assumptions may be more or less informed and more or less justifiable in the face of reason. The beliefs and assumptions most important for education can be organised into four broad areas:
(i) Philosophy of education: beliefs concerned with the nature of human beings, society, socio-political beliefs and ideologies, nature of knowledge, construction and organisation of knowledge, etc.

(ii) Human learning: beliefs concerning epistemology and theories of learning, the nature of learning, it’s scope and its foundations.

(iii) The socio-cultural environment: Beliefs concerning the national socio-political, economic scenario and the context of the child.

(iv) The child: beliefs concerning the child, her nature, her development and so on.

The clarity, usefulness and justifiability of the positions taken by us, are likely to be influenced by our understanding in these areas. To be empowered and independent in developing learning programmes for children, to be able to critique curriculum and pedagogy and to be able to develop her own methods and appropriate activities, a teacher has to explore and learn to reflect on these issues as well. Accumulated information on curriculum and pedagogy or drill in classroom techniques alone is unlikely to develop a teacher or teacher trainer to handle efficiently all the issues relating to quality improvement and pedagogical reform.

This framework could be presented graphically below:

Now we shall try to evolve a notion of quality on the basis of this framework. It is possible to look at the quality from outside the framework, e.g. when we compare two different systems of education, and from within the framework when we have agreed upon the framework first. Looking at the quality from outside the framework would entail first evaluating the framework and then the efficiency of what is being done in the schools. I would suggest that the quality of the framework itself may be
considered to be defined by its comprehensiveness to address the widest range of issues, its consistency, its resilience to accommodate a wide range of local and individual differences without loosing direction and coherence, its ability to provide direction while at the same time respecting the freedom of the user (teacher, curriculum developer, etc.). Clearly autonomy, reason and equity are assumed values even in these remarks; otherwise there would be no justification for insisting on comprehensiveness, consistency, freedom etc.

Here we are more concerned with quality from within the framework. As the framework presented above is just a structure, and aims etc. are not specified, we will have to put some substance into it in order to be able to talk of quality. Developing the entire framework, complete with specifications in each component, would not be possible here due to constraints of space. Therefore, we will start with the minimum filling up of the blanks and see how we progress. Clearly the quality of a school and classroom processes would make no sense without reference to what the children are learning there. Even if a group of children look very happy and their teacher is very nice to them and involved with lots of activities, one would not be able to say anything about the quality of this classroom until one knows the purpose of what is going on. That means that the quality always refers to the objectives of the activity, which in this case shall always refer to the aims of education. Therefore, we need to be supplied with the aims of education in our framework to talk about quality. Suppose the agreed upon aims of education are “development of reason, autonomy, sensitivity to others and ability to learn manual skills quickly”. This kind of articulation of aims will not help us unless we can connect it to the objectives at the primary stage of education. In order to have this much-needed interface we are in need of further information about:

(i) the child’s socio-cultural and natural environment.

(ii) how children learn, (differing accounts of learning processes will generate different objectives).

(iii) the knowledge, skills and attitudes and values that are most beneficial for the development of reason, autonomy, etc.

(iv) the order of teaching all that from the psychological and epistemological points of view.

This brings us to the stage where we may be able to formulate our objectives and put certain things in the curriculum as well. Suppose we formulated our objectives for the primary stage as “helping the child become an interested and independent learner, be sensitive to and respect other people, and learn manual skills at an appropriate level”. This may enable us to construct a broad notion of quality, again in conjunction with a host of other information, assumptions and beliefs. This exercise was only to show that constructing a meaningful notion of quality needs a reference framework with a lot of detailing.

In the direction we are progressing here, at an appropriate level our notion of quality might look somewhat like this:

1. The children:
   (i) Their ability and eagerness to learn new things appropriate to their level (defined in the curriculum) and confidence in learning that.
   (ii) Quantum of their learning achievements, confidence, ability to use and conceptual clarity in what
has been learnt.

(ii) Respect, friendliness and concern shown for friends and other people.

2. The teacher:
   (i) Clarity of understanding about education, the curriculum and subject areas.
   (ii) An understanding of the teaching learning methods.
   (iii) Ability to understand the child’s learning process, pinpoint the difficulty and help her appropriately.
   (iv) Ability to organise classroom processes to the optimal benefit of the children.
   (v) Respect and care shown to the children and other people.

3. Classroom Interaction:
   (i) Engagement with learning that encourages critical thinking and creativity.
   (ii) Encouragement as well as appropriate guidance available to the children.
   (iii) Co-operation in learning and time spent on task.
   (iv) Enthusiasm, absence of fear and stern discipline, and friendliness in the atmosphere.

4. Curriculum:
   (i) Appropriate from the point of view of aims.
   (ii) Internal consistency.
   (iii) Understanding the nature of knowledge and appropriate organisation of knowledge.
   (iv) Appropriateness in terms of children’s developmental stages.
   (v) Relationship to the child’s context.

5. Teaching-Learning Material:
   (i) Appropriateness in terms of the curriculum.
   (ii) Possibilities for learning independently.
   (iii) Attractiveness, ease in handling, etc. production related parameters.
   (iv) Equipment availability.

6. Infrastructure:
   (i) Classrooms – light, space, storage etc.
   (ii) Campus – secure, clean, etc.
   (iii) Facilities.

7. Relationship with the community:
   (i) Mutual respect between the school and the community.
   (ii) Co-operation and interest taken by the community.

The structure given above is indicative and not exhaustive. It is based on the reference framework for education given above and therefore further detailing would demand appropriate detailing in that framework. Each sub-point may generate more than one indicator to understand the quality of the school. The purpose here is only to indicate the broad structure of a framework and the resultant notion of quality of the school, complete details will make a book out of this paper which we need not attempt here.

**What has reached the ground?**

The views expressed below are formed on the basis of reading available literature including material of a few states and classroom studies, observation of a limited number of geographically widely distributed schools, intense interaction with national, state and district level DPEP functionaries, and observation of a limited number of trainings.
The idea that there is a need to be sensitive to the child as a person and her learning processes has been widely disseminated. The specific content of the idea as to what it means to be sensitive, and to what exactly in a child’s nature etc. one needs to be sensitive about, seems to be doubtful. In any case, the child is certainly considered relatively more precious and worthy of respect. And this is not a small gain even if its impact on the practice is still in doubt.

The quality of the school has come into focus. The classrooms are better kept, and perhaps many more teachers are aware of the need to improve teaching methods, than there were earlier to DPEP efforts. Also the programme has communicated to the teachers and people in general in DPEP districts that something needs to be done to improve the schools, and also that attempts are being made in this respect.

Availability of material and textbooks has improved in most of the states. The classroom studies also capture instances of effective use of the material. The availability of various kinds of teachers’ books, manuals, and textbooks does help teachers and improves teacher motivation. The quality of the material is frequently appreciated, and there is a definite improvement as compared to the earlier books. Perhaps the biggest gain of the programme so far is the improved textbooks. The attempt of many states to develop a comprehensive package is especially note worthy and commendable, in spite of all the problems. I have not analysed these aspects in greater detail as they are frequently appreciated points. I found it more useful at this stage to concentrate on the limited and at places misleading understanding of issues in education, which no one comments about. Not devoting more space to these improvements does not mean that they are ignored.

Furthermore the continuous talk of activity-based teaching has resulted in various kinds of efforts to teach children through more active pedagogy, though the quality of these activities varies hugely.

However what is lacking is the following: The teacher is unable to practice in a reflective manner and depends on the activities supplied to her. This trend of quest for activities is wide spread. In a national workshop state level functionaries were very upset that no new activities were being supplied to them, what would they show as the gain of attending another national level workshop if there are no activities to take back home! The idea that teaching in school is an engagement with the mind of the child and suitable activities could be generated, if need be, there and then only, is a far cry.

Education is understood and approached in a narrow perspective. It is so completely bound by three subject areas that absence of art (aesthetic appreciation) and dexterity to work with hands go unnoticed. The three subject areas themselves are supposed to be completely contained in competencies. The inconsistency of detailed lesson-wise plans for the whole class and preaching about child sensitive free-paced learning is unnoticed. There are numerous such inconsistencies related with further month-wise division of curriculum, testing methods developed etc., that pull the teacher in two different directions and do not help her to develop a coherent vision of education.

The idea of education for democracy and development of critical thinking is far from the teachers’ ideals as well as practices. The programme itself does not seem to be too concerned with these ideas.
A few ideas which may contribute to sustained attempts at quality improvement

1. Development of DIETs as institutions of educational excellence: The biggest weakness of DPEP to my mind is, that it was started without adequate understanding of what educational reform might mean. It did not make enough effort to generate academically sound educational theories that could inspire the practitioner and provide practical guidance of a reliable nature. This needs to be done on a very large scale, a dynamics of educational thought and action has to be started if the quality improvement is to become a reality. It seems to be possible to build upon the efforts already made by the DPEP in terms of bringing quality of education on the agenda. For this the educational discourse initiated in the schools, CRCs and BRCs need to gain depth and rigour. Quality educational programmes demand more than just slogans and an ‘epistemology of superficial consensus’. The rich educational thought and research should inform the efforts. The DIETs can be developed to keep abreast with the educational thought and research world over and work out implications for educational efforts in their own district. To develop DIETs as centres of educational excellence, the DIET personnel would need to spend time and energy in studying education and preparing themselves, forming a sound academic base takes time. The idea is not to swallow as many educational theories as fast as possible, it is rather to develop a critical faculty to assess the worth of educational ideas and see their implications.

2. Availability of serious educational thought in accessible form: The material available to the Hindi reader is more in the nature of educational best sellers. There have been a few recent attempts to make available educational classics and relatively more serious educational thought. But still there is a need to do much more in this direction. Every workshop in DPEP revolves around the child’s ways of learning, but there is hardly any authentic material available to the teacher to read on the subject. Only the availability of authentic material in accessible form can break the spell of workshop modes of producing knowledge and help generate a deeper, more informed discourse on education. A whole culture of educational magazines and journals has to be developed to keep the idea of quality education centre stage. Good quality teachers’ journals linking theory and practice can inform the practice and help involve teachers in theory building. These ideas can be initially tried in a few districts with the help of individuals and groups with requisite capabilities.

3. Teachers and their quality: The idea of getting less and less expensive, and therefore, less and less qualified teachers has to be abandoned. Well-qualified teachers and better pre-service professional courses will be needed for sustainable quality improvement. Opportunities for teachers to improve upon their professional capabilities would have to be created to sustain their interest. Quality improvement in primary education without attempts to develop teaching as a profession is impossible. Teaching as a profession is not viable where there are a large number of ill-paid part-time workers doing the job. Therefore, the spreading of the para-teacher phenomenon has to be contained.

4. Teacher-Child ratio: Most of the states have an average teacher-pupil ratio between 1:40
and 1:50, and the variations across the schools are still large. Unless serious attempts are made to improve upon it and the teacher-pupil ratio is brought into the range of 1:40 to 1:30, pedagogical improvement would be extremely difficult to bring about and impossible to sustain.

5. General implementation and infrastructure:
   In spite of all the talk about providing school buildings and material etc. there are thousands of schools without adequate classrooms and textbooks. Unless these schools are provided with buildings and material, talk of classroom quality does not make much sense to them. Also general implementation of the programme needs to be improved. Strong BRCs and CRCs would go a long way in improving implementation.
Appendix 1

In a training Hall

About thirty to thirty-five teachers were working in groups of five or six each. Two trainers were present and were going round the room to see how the work was progressing. When the visitor enquired about the activity in progress, the trainers explained that a discussion paper is given and each group is deliberating on one of the five questions posed through the discussion paper. The visitor requested for a copy of the discussion paper, which the trainers said they have developed. An English translation of the discussion paper is given in the box. The discussion paper is straight from one of the manuals.

Discussion Paper  
Time 15 minutes

1. What is a child in your view -
   a. An empty pot which is to be filled.
   b. Wet clay which is to be moulded.
   c. A plant which is to be watered.
   d. An unbaked clay pot which is to be baked.

2. What children learn in the first eight years is very important, and it is difficult to change.
   (Agree/disagree/somewhat agree)

3. Children learn (more) by doing by themselves, and less by doing by themselves, and less by imitation.
   (Agree/disagree/somewhat agree)

4. What is relationship between the process of learning and mistakes? Why are mistakes made?

5. What (among the following) a teacher should be in your view:
   a. Facilitator
   b. Learned man
   c. Friend
   d. Something else.

Then the next group members were asked to express their views on whether what children learn in the first eight years is very important, unforgettable and fixed for all time. Again the participants expressed their views one by one. There was no discussion and no comments apart from “thik hai”, “Ji”, “bahut achha”, and “very good”. Again the procedure of going in order was abandoned in the middle, and the same participant was asked to express his view.

“The first eight years are very important. The child’s senses are very sharp during this time. What he learns is important and permanent, but if he has learnt something wrong it can be changed, though not easily”, he said.
“Correct”, the trainer said. “Did you hear Respected Sirs, the first eight years are important but wrong things learnt can be changed. Very good.”

Now the members of the third group were asked to share their views on whether children learn by “doing themselves” or through imitation. Again, the same one by one procedure was abandoned in the middle and the same participant was asked to have his say. Again his answer was found to be “correct”. In all the five questions the same man was found to be correct, he was always asked to speak after discontinuing the ‘one-by-one in order’ procedure. The visitor later on discovered that all the correct answers were from the training manual. There was only one dispute (that too unsuccessful) about an answer before the teacher was declared to be a facilitator (sugamkarta) and not a learned man (gyani or jnani). An old teacher made an impassioned plea to pay attention to the fact that someone who does not have adequate knowledge cannot be a teacher, and therefore, a teacher has to be a learned man. His view was shot down by the trainer without giving any reasons.

Maybe this was an exceptional training, but the visitor saw another one which was no better. Still this could be the story of one district and everywhere else the training may be going on very well. But there is also a possibility that this is how the majority of training workshops are conducted!
REFLECTIONS ON THE PROGRESS OF DPEP
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO UTTAR PRADESH

Dr. Brigid Smith

Introduction

The state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) is one of the largest in India in terms of both demography and population. With 166 million inhabitants, it currently accounts for 16.17 per cent of the country’s population.1 Extending from the outskirts of Delhi and the well-watered farmlands and industrial outposts of the capital to a dusty and remote interior, it is hemmed on one side by the Himalaya foothills (which now form the new bifurcated state of Uttaranchal) and by Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh on the other. The density of population in UP is among the highest in India (689 per sq km against 324 for the country as a whole); it also has a high birth rate. The ratio of women to men is 898 females per 1000 males and there is still a 28 per cent lag in female literacy, although overall literacy rates have improved to an average 57.36 per cent since the 1991 census.2 The low female literacy rate and the high incidence of poverty in the state are considered the main reasons for its backwardness and the Government of Uttar Pradesh (GOUP) has made concerted efforts to universalise education, with particular focus on girls and minority communities.

Launched in 17 districts in 1993 with International Development Agency (IDA) funding, the Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Project (UPBEP) was completed in September 2000. DPEP-II was started in 18 educationally backward districts in 1997 and expanded to a further four districts in July 1999. Of the remaining 44 districts, the 38 with the lowest female literacy rate (below the national average of 39.3 per cent) were taken up under DPEP-III.

I first visited UP in 1994 as part of various missions for UPBEP and subsequently worked with officers and the State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) in developing supplementary readers for Classes I-V. It has been very interesting to revisit UP in 2001 after the huge inputs from DPEP-II and III and to observe the changes that have taken place in the state. The marathon task of UPBEP was concentrated in the poorest districts and visits to remote schools during my earlier visits gave a picture of communities isolated by poverty and ignorance, with disinterested teachers and uninvolved people. Initially, the main thrust was to build schools, Block (BRCs) and Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs), to set up teacher training programmes and to complete a baseline for learning achievement. A considerable amount of time and effort was spent up ladders inspecting roof beams, measuring the flood-level threshold of foundations and learning to rub mortar between the fingers to judge whether the cement content was all that it should be.

Communities did not always respect their new school buildings and teachers were demotivated by finding classrooms spoiled and

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2 2001 Census of India Provisional Population Totals. Registrar General of India.
filthy when they came to school in the morning. In 2001, it was a great pleasure to open a new school in a remote area of Meerut with garlands, ribbon-cutting and blessings. This school building represented one of the five new designs; brightly coloured, with two hexagonal wings and a multicoloured roof rising to a point at each end, the school was attracting a great deal of local attention. The devolved responsibility for funding and building, the close relationship with the engineers’ department and the involvement of the Pradhan (head of the village) and many village workers meant that the pride in the school emanated from the community itself. Inside the bright classrooms, where light and air circulated, two classes were already full of children (22 in Classes I-III and 12 in Classes IV-V) although the school had only been open for a few months. Several children had transferred from nearby private schools and were happily learning. The head-teacher and a Shiksha Mitra (SM) were teaching the children, as many girls as boys, in a multi-grade situation. All children had textbooks, the teacher had planned the lesson using the new Teacher Guide and there were charts, teaching-learning materials (TLM) and mats to sit on in the classroom. It would be simplistic to imagine that every school in UP has now evolved to this state; nevertheless, this exemplifies the kind of benchmark of resources and conditions that are required for effective education to take place. The biggest change I saw was perhaps in the faces of the children. They were bright and eager, keen to perform their songs and games and replying to questions with a confident grace and interest. Photographs from earlier visits show pinched faces and unkempt, frightened children; when one of the baseline researchers tried to move a child from one part of the veranda to another, they shrank away and began to cry.

In 2001 I visited nine schools, a small sample. I was conscious, of course, that as a member of a reviewing mission, people wanted me to see the best that there was to see. In visiting Meerut district I was already visiting one of the more developed parts of UP, but in many ways it was good to be able to see the impact of DPEP inputs in a situation where the basic conditions were not so overwhelmingly adverse as to make progress unlikely. The development of quality in primary education, the present focus of DPEP, can really only take place when the basic conditions for learning and teaching are in place. The Assistant Basic Shiksha Adhikari (ABSA) in Meerut referred to quality of primary schools being ‘at its worst’ and recognised that there was a very long way to go in order to improve primary schooling. An indication of the need for quality improvement in Meerut is the fact that it is estimated that over 51 per cent of children are enrolled in private schools, many of them unrecognised.

Putting in a place an efficient, equitable and quality government school system is the current intention of the UP State Government, with a declared goal of education for all by 2005. In Meerut, a fairly recent DPEP-III district, there was a feeling of buzzing enthusiasm and interest on the part of children and more confident and open kind of teachers, proud of their classrooms and resources, many of which were self-made. The community now seem to have an ownership of their schools and feel involved in many issues — ranging from enrolment and out-of-school children to the curriculum.

This report, then, is partly a celebration of achievements seen and potential developments identified, and partly an attempt to see UPDPEP in the larger context of the state, India and other primary educational reforms. In particular, it focuses on issues related to capacity building for teachers, girls’ education, the community involvement in education and the alternative schooling (AS) that is being developed for
minority communities. Having been afforded an opportunity to reflect on DPEP from the perspective of a teacher, the narrative is derived from observation and experience, rather than an attempt to replicate other reports where statistics and project reportage exhibit an objectivity which I lay no claim to here.

**The Reform of Primary Education**

The reform of primary education is a worldwide movement emanating from the original Jomtien conference (held in Thailand in 1990) and motivating all countries to try to achieve education for all in the near future. Reforms have been provoked by a growing realisation that learning the ‘content’ of a curriculum cannot meet the demands of the modern world where ‘learning how to learn’ is more important than just learning facts to regurgitate. This kind of learning starts pre-school and the primary years are critical in developing self-motivated and reflective learners who are able to solve problems and to generalise and apply their learning to real life situations. The rhetoric of the Government of India (GOI) puts the capacity building and support of the teacher, and the development of the individual child through interactive and experiential education, as a central tenet, as indeed do the governmental statements of many other countries undertaking reforms of their primary education system. There remain, however, huge gaps between the rhetoric about primary education and the actuality of the classroom. The rhetoric supports the teacher; the directives serve to constrain, centralise and direct. The child is central in the idealistic statements; the actuality is often a reduction of the individual child to a number to fulfil the needs of bureaucrats to meet enrolment targets. Assessment procedures seem designed to exclude and to rank order schools rather than to monitor individual progress. In UK, where extensive government-driven reforms claim to support teachers and to promote children’s individual learning, there has been increasing centralisation and curtailment of teachers’ freedom to interpret the curriculum resulting in an increasingly large deficit in the number of teachers, particularly in inner city schools.4

The reform of basic education in UP was stimulated by the need to develop the educational capacity of a state overwhelmed by numbers, poverty and slow progress in development. The inequality of women, the lag in the female birth rate ratio and the paucity of girls in formal education were contributory factors to the particular emphasis on girls’ education and the enrolment of girls. The rise of strong advocacy groups for women’s rights5 and the growth of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working directly with women in the field of literacy and income generation have supported and pressurised the government in the reforms undertaken to encourage the enrolment of girls. Specific GOUP initiatives6 at state level include:

- Free education for girls up to graduation;
- Facilitation for women and girls to receive certification by appearing for the Class V and Class VIII end-of-cycle examinations, thus enabling them to continue in mainstream education if they wish;
- Employment of SMs as para-teachers, of whom 50 per cent should be women, in order to reduce the teacher-pupil ratio

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(TPR) and to improve the availability of women teachers, particularly in remote and one-teacher rural schools; and
- The launch of the Balika Shiksha Mission in 1999 for girls aged 6-14 years unable to attend mainstream schooling.

Apart from conveying a message about the importance given to girls’ education by the GOUP, the institutionalisation of reforms at state level makes it far more likely that they will be sustainable. A number of other reform measures at governmental level have contributed to the slow but sustained growth in primary education in UP. The 1999 delegation of the management of basic education to Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) encouraged communities to manage their own educational programmes. It also served to devolve accountability to the local level, making the community responsible for overseeing the education of all children in the community — whether girls, out-of-school or from minority groups.

The most recent, and potentially the most important reform in UP in terms of reducing class size and pupil-teacher ratio and improving teacher quality has been the recent hike in teachers’ salaries. This gives all teachers a good, basic wage and in return demands from them improved attendance, improved efforts in teaching and accountability to both the government and the local community. It would seem that this is a basic condition for improving educational standards. It has wide implications and experiences in other countries have shown that reform in teaching standards is difficult where teachers still require additional income in order to support their families. In Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the ubiquitous ‘tuition’ system has meant that some teachers do not cover the whole syllabus in class in order to earn from tutoring children during after-school hours. This can impede overall quality improvement in the classroom and particularly impacts on poor people who are not able to help their children at home. Pakistan and other parts of India have tried overcoming the problem of class size by providing a second teacher in single-teacher schools, although this has sometimes been used as a ‘cover’ device allowing each teacher in turn to farm or work in another capacity. The growth of extra para-teachers with community accountability is now reversing this trend.

Most encouraging of all are the efforts of the GOUP to link DPEP educational inputs and reforms to the work of state and district administrations. Since 1993 there have only been two State Project Directors (SPDs) and, where possible, State Project and District Project officials have been kept in post for a reasonable length of time; the newly created state of Uttarakhand is benefiting from the directorship of a long-time DPEP officer. Increasingly women’s organisations and the Labour, Women and Child and Urban Development Departments support the work of DPEP. Convergence of services for Integrated Education of the Disabled (IED) is also evident in UP. However over-optimism about the capacity of the state to support initiatives, such as the work of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), could have detrimental effects if the support is halted.7 The fact that ECCE has not been included in the recent 93rd Amendment, education as a right being given only from 6–14, underlines the problem of getting administrators to see the importance of pre-school education and, in particular, the way in which it can support elder siblings to continue their schooling. Northern countries have learned late, and painfully, that access to pre-school education is essential for children in socially deprived groups if they are to benefit from their formal education.

7 13th JRM State Report, DPEP.
The Primary School Teacher

The success of any education project ultimately depends on the teacher. This is particularly true of the primary education project. The child in the classroom is the last in the line of a cascade of reforms and inputs that reach her or him only through the agency of the teacher. Most teachers are only receivers; training, teaching materials, pedagogy, all come to them after a long journey from the source. It is true that a few teachers are included in primary training programmes or become involved in materials development; but then their enhanced skills become so valuable that they are usually caught up in training or management posts. Many teachers struggle with poor training that does not link new pedagogy or ideas with their own skills or experience; they are expected to change their ideas about how or what to teach when often they have only their own educational experience and classroom practice to fall back on. Many teachers also struggle to practise new training in conditions that are not amenable to change: large classes, disinterested or hostile leadership within the school, insufficient materials and no support from more knowledgeable colleagues. Added to this are the physical conditions of poor classrooms — or no classroom at all — teacher shortages causing large classes and multi-levels of required teaching, and many places where salaries are poor and the demands of other duties, such as those relating to census work or elections, erode teaching time. Project leaders and funding agencies make their final demands for accountability on the teacher and thought is increasingly being given to finding a threshold from which innovations and reforms can take place and below which not a lot can be expected of the teacher.

There are basic minimum conditions that require to be fulfilled before new methodologies can be practised. Even enthusiastic young teachers are daunted by the lack of support from head-teachers and the hostility of parents. They are not fluent with the ideas they are practising and often find it difficult to justify what they are doing in convincing ways. The most commonly heard response when visiting classrooms to follow up teacher training is, 'It just isn’t possible to do it here.' This is often from teachers who have enjoyed training, shown new talents and are keen to implement what they have learned. Visiting such a school in Pakistan where children were sitting bored in rows while a teacher ‘minded’ three classes at a time, the new supplementary readers, designed to support such situations, were found never to have been unpacked. The teacher had been keen in training but unable to combat the failure of the head-teacher to give the necessary books to him. Other classes suffer from wind and rain; in some, white ants eat the charts and TLM; at last the teacher gives up and goes back to the easier option of rote learning.

The minimum necessary conditions need to be put in place so that teachers can get some kind of grip on the changes they are told to make in their classrooms. New curriculum initiatives take time and support to become integrated into the teachers’ practice. The experience of Northern countries shows how resistant teachers can be and how much practice and support they require in order to move positively into a change situation. The chart in Figure 1 makes an attempt at determining some of the conditions that are probably necessary before innovation and change can take place. Under DPEP, many of these conditions are starting to be met. The current focus of DPEP on quality is an indication that some of the basic needs are also beginning to be fulfilled. A gradual decentralisation process is taking place and as communities and teachers become more involved as primary users and decision-makers, the dynamics of change are beginning to occur. As a result, a glimmering of
the desired ends of busy, interactive and happy primary classrooms can be seen in the developing areas of DPEP.

Against this, the pressure on class sizes has not yet stabilised as increased enrolment and re-enrolment bites into the available space and recruited teachers. Schools outgrow their new buildings and reconstructed classrooms as more and more children enrol and then stay on beyond Class I. Additional benefits, like ECCE groups operating in schools to enable older siblings to continue education, take up valuable space; their sisters released from their care swell the sizes of the upper grade classes.

In many states, including UP, the para-teacher has been recruited to help the regular teacher and to bring down class sizes. Locally appointed and accountable to the Village Education Committee (VEC), they are less likely to move on than the regular teacher. The problem of class size is very district-specific and particularly impacts on remote areas. Single teachers, even if assisted by para-teachers, can feel isolated and vulnerable in these areas. More importantly, they are unable to educate their own children in good schools. A study done for the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project (APPEP) showed that even the provision of good quality housing could not entice teachers to these remote areas, the issue of their own children’s education being the overriding factor. New and innovative ways of dealing with recruitment in remote areas, particularly of women teachers, need to be found. Some initiatives in the NGO sector show possible ways of dealing with this. The question remains of quality and training for para-teachers and the social issue of differentiated pay for what is often nearly the same amount of work and responsibility. Many states are currently considering their position regarding para-teachers and AS instructors. The development of Distance Learning resources in the states may indicate some possible ways of developing in-school training programmes for under-qualified teachers. Equally, the development of high quality schooling in remote areas might make teachers less anxious about their own children’s primary education.

Another consideration is the issue of time. Projects and programmes are of necessity time-bound and require change to happen in a quantifiable way within the project term. In fact, many changes take place slowly and almost imperceptibly. Kress refers to the need to embed change in the known context of the teacher’s experience and understanding. He suggests the metaphor of a frame that has a limited but stable view of the scene. Widening the frame too rapidly results in loss of focus and disintegration. Slow widening of the frame means that the teacher’s view is enlarged and a wider landscape comes into the frame, but the landmarks remain to give confidence and security. But time is a luxury denied to project organisers and managers who are constantly required to produce results. It is interesting to have been involved in Andhra Pradesh (AP) over a period of 12 years, first in APPEP and later in DPEP. In the early days, Andhra was considered something of a rural joke in terms of the possibility of effecting positive change in their education system. Certainly poverty, poor infrastructure and limited views of primary education caused difficulties. Now, however, mission reports refer to the good example of

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9 Aga Khan Foundation Northern Areas Small Schools initiative and BRAC locally based, trained and supervised teachers show some such innovations using mobile teachers, providing transport and supervision.
AP; the fourteenth Joint Review Mission (JRM) found it was Andhra that produced the significant innovation of a simple format for classroom assessment based on literacy skills and rated 1-3 by teachers for individual children. Neat, economical and grounded in good educational theory, it serves the purpose well.

**Figure 1**

**Prevailing Conditions, Outcomes and Classroom Implications**

**The Search for a Threshold**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Prevailing conditions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Outcomes</strong></th>
<th><strong>Classroom implications</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very large PTR</td>
<td>Large classes</td>
<td>Survival strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No external support</td>
<td>Non-coverage of curriculum</td>
<td>Inactive classroom</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hostile community</td>
<td>Frequent teacher absenteeism</td>
<td>No community support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching more than one class</td>
<td>High dropout rate</td>
<td>Children frequently unsupervised</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crumbling classrooms or unsheltered teaching space</td>
<td>Low enrolment</td>
<td>Low attendance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Top-down direction</td>
<td>Meaningless statistics</td>
<td>Many children dropping out</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Inadequate and infrequent teacher training</td>
<td>Higher enrolment but low completion</td>
<td>Few or no textbooks</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Harsh’ supervision</td>
<td>High repetition rates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Little space for activities</td>
<td>Teachers ‘performing’ activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher training inputs not based on classroom realities</td>
<td>Authoritarian inspection with no individual feedback</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Insufficient teaching space</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment procedures in place but no help given with weak areas – content, management and methodology</td>
<td>Supervision but no focused follow-up</td>
<td>‘Active’ classrooms only when visited</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning achievement tests</td>
<td>Assessment with no feedback or remedial attention</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mechanical teaching without interest or relevance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No attention to individual needs or multi-grade situation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Poorer children frequently repeat a year</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>One teacher to a class</td>
<td>Reasonable resources</td>
<td>Teachers teach to the test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough classrooms</td>
<td>Use of trained para-teachers</td>
<td>Teachers devise tests based solely on textbook content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-grade strategies and materials in place for small schools</td>
<td>Children complete curriculum</td>
<td>Frequent repetition</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fewer dropouts</td>
<td>Teacher knowledge is incomplete</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less repetition</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**A FEASIBLE BASELINE?**

Teacher able to implement training in classroom
Teacher plans lessons
Teacher can devise simple tests
Teacher uses some active pedagogy
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbook and Teacher Guide</th>
<th>Group work used to support individual learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher training related to classroom procedures and materials</td>
<td>Teacher records assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head-teacher training</td>
<td>Girl’s enrol and stay in school longer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable PTRs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-school leadership and support for training</td>
<td>Teachers innovate and practice new ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision in-school</td>
<td>Teachers discuss plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability to the community</td>
<td>School improvement plans made with community help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community support</td>
<td>Out of school children seen to be whole school responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size not more than 40/1</td>
<td>Needs of girls, disabled and minority communities are taken care of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-grade with less than 30 children</td>
<td>Children are happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement in completion rate of children</td>
<td>Children learn to their potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less or no repetition</td>
<td>Homework is given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic support at all levels of the system</td>
<td>Parents go to school with problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and district level ASGs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRCs, CRCs and DIETs support teachers links with whole state support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up and adjustment of teacher training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and community fully involved in decision making</td>
<td>Accountable schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment procedures transparent and functional</td>
<td>Achieving children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant learning achievement tests</td>
<td>Coherent School-based assessment by teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved examination results</td>
<td>New TLM and textbook updates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion up to Class VIII achieved by most children</td>
<td>Frequent locally specific teacher training that is effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing review and development of teacher training and TLM including textbooks</td>
<td>Involved communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership of basic education by the whole country</td>
<td>Girls and minority communities fully schooled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It has taken time for the scattering of enthusiastic teachers and educators, creative individuals and positive institutions to spread ideas and to support change, which is happening now. The success achieved by AP should serve as a positive signal to states that entered DPEP at a later date. Another, perhaps equally significant, point is that states that are achieving well in spite of infrastructure and economic difficulties such as AP, MP and UP have also had the benefit, in UP’s case consistently, of very strong leadership and of the ability to embed DPEP reforms in a governmental system and thereby achieve a</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
degree of convergence and slow but sure growth that will be sustainable in the future.

One of the problems is that Logical Frameworks for projects often set contradictory or difficult to achieve targets and sometimes quality is lost in the pursuit of these targets within the given time limit. DPEP targets quantified increases in enrolment and retention and also improvements in learning achievement as key indicators of the programme’s success. At the time, this no doubt seemed to be what people would want to see as outcomes from a successful programme input. The two targets are, however, if they are to be honestly pursued, counter-productive. Increases in enrolment necessarily mean that more first-time learners, more marginalised groups and more socially disadvantaged learners will enter the school. Classes will be larger, the differential between learners’ ability greater, and the teacher will be under more pressure. These conditions will tend to depress the learning achievement of the whole class when it is taken as an average. The only serious quantifiable measure of improvement in learning would be to set assessment procedures to measure an individual’s progress against their own baseline. In England, attempts to measure school effectiveness have included measuring learning achievement as a whole. However, disaggregated results show that schools scoring highly at the baseline do not necessarily have as successful results as those scoring poorly at the baseline but whose pupils make a greater progress from the baseline. Aggregated scores and school-to-school comparisons often mask the real story.

Materials Development and Teacher Training.

The reform of textbooks and curriculum has been a central tenet of DPEP activities. The proper reform of materials is a time-consuming process that has to allow for mistakes, revisions and proper classroom trialling if it is to be effective. The textbook is the central teaching aid of most Southern classrooms; attempts to widen the scope of textbook use in primary classrooms by introducing multiple textbook programmes (e.g. Kenya and Sri Lanka) often founder on the limited ability of the teacher and head-teacher to choose effectively from a range of books and, in Kenya’s case, abuse of the system by publishers anxious to ensure wide distribution of their books. In Sri Lanka, getting a range of good textbooks available has meant a great deal of work in terms of assessing content, bias and developing textbook writers. In other countries, including India, textbook writing in the past has been a discrete activity, undertaken by a few people from universities or SCERT, many of whom have limited knowledge of the reality of the primary classroom but are reluctant to widen the constituency of writers. Textbook reform has included the need to build teams of people with the capacity and understanding of the primary curriculum to be able to write appropriate learning materials.

Textbooks are also frequently political dynamite. As recent extensive press coverage of the history textbook furore in India has shown, content can be contentious. The shift of emphasis in the World Bank and DFID supported projects in Sri Lanka has tended to

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13 See, for example, extensive press coverage in all newspapers during the week of 25th November 2001.
be towards the importance of learning materials, particularly textbooks and supplementary reading materials, in supporting equity and in contributing towards stability and harmony in areas of conflict.\textsuperscript{14} Textbook production is lucrative and opening it up to others causes conflicts that reach ministerial level. Integrating modern theories of child development and linguistic effectiveness can cause traditional responses that are negative. Attempts in AP to change the order of teaching the alphabet to encourage the development of fine motor skills in children by grouping letters according to the way they are written resulted in the accusation that ‘the project is trying to abolish the Telugu alphabet’. Again, trialling textbooks in a well-chosen sample of schools is expensive and time consuming; it remains, however, an important way of ensuring relevance and effective learning.\textsuperscript{15}

Maybe a summary of some of the lessons learned in the production of textbooks and supplementary materials will indicate both the progress made under DPEP and also the time that is required to get it right.

- Textbooks require to be structured to support the child’s cognitive and physical development.
- Teachers need to be involved in textbook writing because they know and understand the classroom conditions.
- Innovative teachers have already developed new ways of learning and teaching some of the curriculum.
- Content needs to be geared to the age level of the child, to be concrete rather than abstract in procedure and to include continuity and progression.
- What children learn is mostly through interaction. Textbooks need to provoke talk, activities or interactive engagement with the text. The content should be connected to activities that take children beyond the necessarily limited text itself.
- Children love narrative and humour – both of which top the surveys of children’s reading responses.\textsuperscript{16} They can be used in an effective and stimulating way to make the textbook interesting and engaging for the learner.
- Didactic and moral teaching is best done through an indirect medium, such as a story, cartoon or inference in the text.
- Bias in terms of gender, caste, culture or religion is often unconsciously embedded in written materials. Writers need training and guidance in this area.
- Illustrations should not be ‘pretty frills’ that make textbooks attractive. Interesting, interactive and learning opportunities are clearly present in Ekavya’s\textsuperscript{17} textbooks and materials, which are only illustrated by line drawings.
- Text, even in early readers and language textbooks, should be cohesive and extensive rather than single words or phrases isolated from each other.
- The language of textbooks and supplementary materials should be close to the oral vocabulary of the child, particularly in the early years. Some flexibility is needed for local input where there are dialect or

\textsuperscript{17} Ekavya, an NGO in Madhya Pradesh produces a wide range of cheap supplementary materials, textbooks and newsletters.
language differences in different areas of a state.  

- Teachers need to be supported by a teacher textbook. This should contain the children’s textbook plus comments, further learning in terms of knowledge content, activities and assessment procedures.
- Teachers need training to use new textbooks and supplementary materials. Training materials and handouts can go a long way in supporting effective use of new materials in the classroom.

In UP they have just completed the teacher guides, and the third phase of teacher training, Saadhan, was based around the use of these in the classroom. Almost all teachers we spoke to on field visits referred to how helpful training had been. We also saw a number of activities and assessment procedures that had been suggested in the teacher guides being used in the classroom.

Supplementary readers, where they can be produced under project expenditure, are an effective way of consolidating reading skills and giving children access to the wider world of knowledge and experience. In Sri Lanka, the ongoing Mother Tongue Supplementary Reader Project (World Bank and DFID) has a wider remit to attempt to contribute to efforts towards social harmony and conflict resolution. The Pre-Service Teacher Training materials (GTZ) also have this as an overriding aim.

NGOs have been less constrained by political considerations in their development of teaching-learning materials. They have often led the way with child-centred and innovative materials that are more suitable for primary age children. The skills of NGOs are being increasingly used to help in state textbook reforms, e.g., Eklavya in MP, Rishi Valley Educational Foundation (RVEF) in AP and Digantar from Rajasthan in several states including UP and the MV Foundation in AP. This is a positive move forward and allows ideas and processes developed in less pressured conditions to be incorporated into government materials.

It is often in NGOs that the space and skills to develop specialist materials is found. RVEF has developed self-learning multi-grade materials and training for use in small, remote tribal schools but their ideas are now in currency amongst much wider communities. In Bangladesh, the Concentrated Learning Improvement Programme (CLIP) concentrates on the development of deep-level learning skills. It has now been adapted and is in use as VIKALP – a learning improvement programme in Uttar Pradesh in Hardoi and Barabanki districts. The gradual generalisation and spread of such innovative programmes will contribute towards the development of teachers’ skills and ensuring quality in the primary classroom.

The teacher remains key to the future development of educational quality and the programme requires the continuation of focused, frequent and well-evaluated inputs as close to the teacher as possible. The local District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) are increasingly taking on responsibility for the task.

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18 For example in Telegana and coastal areas of AP. Interesting experiments in using Telugu script for transcribing local tribal languages have also been undertaken in AP. See the work of Early Learning Institute in Hyderabad.

19 PMSP (Punjab, Pakistan) produced a cheap series of teacher handbooks to supplement the reader project. These were written like a magazine, illustrated by a cartoonist and contained theory in an applied context.

of developing training materials in UP. There is provision for secondment of good teachers (four) to the DIET staff to bring in needed classroom expertise and extra staff for the added responsibilities of assessment, academic supervision, materials development and teacher training. In UP, and it seems also elsewhere, DIETs remain depressingly understaffed. Some training has been given but the impact of poor staffing combined with pre-service responsibilities and school, cluster and block supervision work and training put added pressure on DIET staff. The need to upgrade the status of working in the DIET has been a recurring problem throughout DPEP and earlier projects. The high status of teacher training in northern countries makes it hard to comprehend the reluctance of people to serve in DIETs. It would be good to see states take innovative steps to try and revive these institutions and turn them into the decentralised ‘think tanks’ for primary education in local communities. The recently published studies of work done by DIET in some states are perhaps a first step in this process.  

21 Studies of Work in DIETs in Four States. DPEP Bureau.

Girls’ Education

‘I have learned to look up and speak.’
Tabassum.
Making a Difference: Girls’ Education in Uttar Pradesh. DPEP 2000

The high priority given to encouraging girls’ education is prevalent throughout South Asia. In Northern countries also there has been an emphasis on improving the contribution of girls and on raising girls’ achievement levels. In England, girls now outdo boys in most areas in examinations. The social context for girls’ education, however, still remains problematical. Earlier studies showed that girls were expected by teachers to be cooperative, helpful and tidy and conditioned responses, particularly amongst working class girls, showed low aspirations for their future. Extensive studies have shown that girls often retreat in social classroom situations and usually ‘show their cleverness’ through written work rather than exposing themselves to the possibility of failure in a public arena. The attempt to universalise education for girls in India has to be seen against worldwide difficulties faced by girls, particularly those from poorer communities, in achieving equal educational status with boys.

The correlation between improved women’s literacy and lower birth rates is well known and the spread of women’s literacy both through basic education and adult literacy campaigns brings gradual improvements in health and income generation to the poorest sector of Asian society. There is increasing need for women to be literate and able to earn money as the pace of the modern world begins to erode the values and mores of traditional societies. In Bangladesh, one of the critical areas for focus on poverty reduction has become women head of households. Often deserted by men who have migrated to the city in order to get employment, these women constitute the poorest and most marginalised community. Literacy and continuing education leading to income opportunities is a dire necessity for families on the edge of survival.

The extensive documentation about girls’ education that is produced in UP shows a keen

22 For example studies of Infant School interactions in the 1980s by Beth Goodacre; numerous feminist studies have shown girls in inferior status in schooling situations.
23 The Tidy House.
24 Walkerdine, V: Girls and Schooling.
awareness of this background. One of the items in the school survey requires the observer to note teacher-to-child interactions and to see whether the girls receive the same attention as boys. Interestingly, the results showed no perceptible difference. This is certainly in contrast to previous classroom visits. However, boys are still more frequently asked to be classroom monitors than girls, and girls almost entirely take on cleaning responsibilities in the school. Not only are there still differences in attitude but also role models for girls remain in a minority. In spite of efforts to recruit women teachers, it is still difficult to get women to work in rural and remote areas. The proposed target of 51 per cent women SMs has not been possible to achieve as yet, which means that many small AS schools have no woman teacher. The single-teacher primary school we visited in Meerut had a male teacher and a male SM. However, since the UP documents do not disaggregate teachers by gender, it is difficult to quantify this.

There is also a parallel with the finding about the almost exclusive use of boys as monitors. On a visit to a DIET in Meerut we observed a training session for teachers on gender sensitisation. They were generally very enthusiastic and many claimed to have learned a lot and intended to change their practice on return to school. A question regarding the gender of head-teachers, though, brought an amused response. Only two teachers worked in a school with a female head-teacher. The women teachers’ response to the question ‘How many of you would like to be a head-teacher?’ was an initially slow, with very few raising their hands. Gradually more and more joined in until all but two declared themselves as having ambitions in this area. This raises the question of whether more women would be prepared to go and teach in rural areas if they were given a position of responsibility – a question with many implications for community orientation and training for head-teachers.

UP has a particularly strong focus on women’s empowerment and girls’ education, both within government and in DPEP. Priority is given to communication at community level aimed at changing attitudes, enrolling more girls and ensuring that they complete basic education. There are numerous agencies working in this area and there appears to be good collaboration between them. Mahila Samakhya works at policy level to change attitudes and to keep the issue of women on the state agenda. The changing of traditional attitudes, prevention of early marriage and spread of girls’ education are seen as key activities. Most of these agencies work at field level, often in particular areas, and the enthusiastic women’s groups are impressive to see in action. There are a variety of awareness raising activities through the media, Meena campaigns and creation of local women’s groups such as Maa Beti Melas and Women’s Parliaments. Significant steps forward are being taken in Meerut district, particularly by VECs who seem to have accepted responsibility for out-of-school children, particularly girls. In the words of one VEC member, ‘We are deeply involved and committed to getting them into school.’ One village of 3,000 now claims to be a fully literate village, mostly due to the efforts of the Women’s Motivator Group who have taken on the responsibility of bringing children into school and ensuring that they stay. In this village, schoolteachers visit the homes when children are absent. The women’s groups are particularly strong in this area and have taken on board the issue of girls’ education; in discussions it was clear that they valued the opportunity to meet and discuss issues and that they had their own aspirations and hopes for the future.

In UPDPEP-II, the micro-planning data has
been analysed to show nine categories of reasons for not going to school, with domestic work (47.81 per cent) and sibling care (8.29 per cent) being the largest categories. These two categories obviously affect girls most. ECCE centres are being supported by DPEP and those we saw in schools were full of small children who were being taught songs, had toys to play with and listened to stories. The strong motivation of the women’s groups in Meerut, and the obvious good relationship that they have with capable trainers, might make it possible to extend some of their activities further than just supporting education for girls. One woman referred to her own wish for literacy so that she could read her children’s school books with them; another wanted literacy so that she could get employment of some kind. The issue of domestic work, laborious and time consuming for many women and girls, might be tackled in terms of better management of resources and time; health and hygiene issues would enable children to go to school healthier and to remain in school without extended absences. The development of these women’s groups will be interesting to watch in terms of their great potential for effecting change.

UP has also concentrated efforts for improving girls’ education in terms of quality, attitudes and completion in particular areas of poverty and low enrolment. The Model Development Cluster Approach (MDCA) takes up to 100 schools and concentrates inputs and efforts to raise girls’ enrolment and to change the community and teacher attitudes so that girls are retained in school. The involvement of the VEC, community, parents and teachers has created numbers of villages with full enrolment. The thirteenth JRM mission drew attention to the dropout rate among girls over nine years of age as a particular issue and there has been a very positive and effective response to this. Bridge courses, particularly for working children, bring children back up to the required standard to enable them to re-enrol without failing. Summer camps have been widespread and very successful. These residential camps are mainly for girls and not only give concentrated remedial input for literacy and maths but also include yoga, creative activities and cooperative games in order to help girls gain confidence and self-respect.

One primary school visited in Mithepur has achieved remarkable progress in the months of DPEP-III, which have coincided with the appointment of a new headteacher. The children performed a play exhorting parents to send their girls to school that has been used in the mobilisation of the village. Children were well organised and committed. A group of nine girls had been mainstreamed after the summer camp for dropout and non-enrolled children. They were confident and articulate although, as one of them pointed out, the domestic work expected of them had not changed. ‘Now I have to do school work and work in the house,’ she stated rather ruefully. The women representatives on the VEC claimed to have no difficulty or diffidence about speaking and in getting people to hear their views. One had volunteered an idea to introduce sewing and other viable crafts suitable for girls into the curriculum as she felt that this would help to keep them in school. However, she added that, ‘No one paid much attention to the idea!’ This is a village with full enrolment and a vibrant and interested VEC determined to maintain the girls in school until the end of basic education.

The gain in self-respect and confidence achieved by women and girls can be a powerful agent for change. In Bangladesh, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) is using adolescent girls to lead group meetings (called adolescent library groups), where issues regarding marriage, divorce, AIDS and birth
control are freely discussed. In UP, they are using a similar model to follow up basic non-formal education for adolescents. This provides space for girls to meet, to continue reading and play games and to maintain contact with their teacher. In traditional communities adolescent girls can be very isolated, constrained by social norms to stay in their homes at a time when they most need to be able to talk to their peers. These libraries have proved very valuable and probably help girls to resist the pressure for early marriage to some extent.

In spite of many efforts to provide for girls to enter education, difficulties remain. Communities are increasingly finding their own solutions and this is a very positive sign. The issue of girls’ safety has high priority in traditional societies where marriage is seen as the ultimate aim for girls. Remote or urban situations where girls must negotiate lonely roads or pass through areas of high risk constrain parents from sending them to school. Physical difficulties such as rivers, mountains or flood-prone areas also create problems. In many communities they are seeking to solve the problem in a local way. Some communities now send girls to school in a group with trusted escorts; others have contributed to building a new school nearer to their habitations; and yet others have applied pressure on government officials for improvement of infrastructure. The pressure of domestic work and sibling care requires community support and pressure, and possibly the support of mothers to enable them to manage without their daughter’s assistance for part of the day. ECCE centres in schools support older girls burdened with the care of younger siblings.

Gender issues do not end with the education of girls and the empowerment of women. In order to ensure progress in equity it is also necessary to effect attitudinal change in boys and men. Efforts to give gender training to secondary schoolboys in Bangladesh by an NGO have revealed areas of ignorance and fear; boys also need to understand the issues of women’s empowerment. Men and boys too need to develop different ways of negotiating, of expressing feelings and of sharing heavy family responsibilities with their wives and daughters. An interesting finding from a field study in Bangladesh was the fact that women cited ‘shared decision-making’ as one of the benefits following continuing education and their ability to contribute to the family income. Domestic work in the home is often not valued as work (in the North as well as the South) and women’s voices are hard to hear; income generation gives women a voice and creates shared family values and aspirations. In this sense, it is important. Hostility towards gender issues often centres on the divisive and socially disturbing outcomes from some empowerment activities. There is thus a need for constant discussion, negotiation and honest appraisal of what is happening. The collective power of women who have been trained to listen, assess and negotiate situations can support great changes. Residential facilities for women’s training, such as Mahila Shikshan Kendras in UP and the BRAC and Prashika residential centres in Bangladesh, give women the opportunity to learn skills and to understand the life skills necessary for the improvement of health and social situations.

In India and other Asian countries, education of girls is not a simple matter of achieving UEE. Girls’ education relates strongly to issues of poverty reduction, lowering of the population


growth rate and the improved economic condition of the country. It is good to see the increased importance that this issue is acquiring.

**Alternative Schooling**

‘I tell them – if they don’t send their children to school then they can’t have a job.’

Brickworks Owner: Kirali Bhatta

The size of India with its large rural areas, jungle, mountains, river plains and scattered populations has always made the provision of centralised education problematical. Many minority groups live in small habitations unserved by any infrastructure. Bringing education to children in these places is not easy. Equally, overcrowded urban areas of cities serve to marginalise certain groups. And it is in the cities that the most number of working children is found and where Muslim minorities largely live. Migrant communities, too, tend to constellate towards cities or other areas where seasonal work is available, often following centuries-old patterns of movement. Initial efforts to educate tribal communities resulted in boarding schools where children spent most of their time away from home, losing touch with their families, culture and language, and causing hardship by their absence from home when needed to help with harvest or other activities. The development of small, locally specific schools is a great improvement on the centralised effort to provide education. It brings to mind the words of Gandhi that in a country the size of India, no central government can hope to deliver the needed education to so many diverse communities. The strength of the AS school is in its local relevance – with the teacher a local person usually able to speak the language or dialect of the children and the community involved in providing the teacher and in supporting the school by providing land or space for it to operate in. In many ways AS schooling seems to present an ideal solution to an intractable demographic problem.

There are issues connected with AS schooling, however, that continue to be raised. Is AS schooling creating a second-class education for poorer and marginalised communities? The question has certainly been asked for a considerable time and polemical statements made about the dangers of creating this dual standard for education. States have dealt with the problem in different ways but the UP solution is firmly embedded in their policy that all children should eventually be educated in formal primary schools. The AS school serves as a transition point between non-schooling and formal schooling. It allows dispossessed and un-enrolled children to learn the basics of literacy and then to progress to the local primary school. The formal school textbooks and materials are used in AS schools and the target is integration. There remain unserved areas where AS schools will no doubt continue to exist and some kinds of communities who may well be best served by alternative education. Migrant communities always face the problem of ‘learning lag’ as they leave their school and move on. This problem has been solved to some extent in England for traveller (gypsy) children who are migrant by creating a learning record that children carry with them from place to place. Such individualised learning progress and attainment records may not yet be feasible but as AS teachers become better trained, they are a possibility.

A second question relates to the teacher. Chosen from the community and trained, they can be isolated from other teachers and require training and support, particularly training based on difficulties experienced in their classroom. BRAC supervisors visit their para-teachers weekly and identify problems. The monthly block-level training programme is then based
on the identified difficulties. Another worrying concern identified by the fourteenth JRM is the fact that in the majority of single-teacher AS schools, the teachers are male; as traditional attitudes often exist in remote areas, this seems to militate strongly against girls’ regular attendance at school. Again questions are frequently raised, both in India and other Asian countries, about the status, pay and training of instructors. It is an obvious solution for impoverished governments but in the long term, it can allow governments to abrogate their responsibility to fund education properly so that fully trained teachers are available for all schools. Also, and again in the long term, what happens to the brilliantly performing AS teachers? Can they become formal teachers and in what way can they contribute to educational progress? These issues are likely to acquire more prominence as formal primary education gets better established and marginalised communities start to demand equal rights.

One of the eight versions of AS schooling in UP is an adaptation of the RVEF model. Here teachers and children are trained to record progress in order to facilitate multi-grade classroom learning. These materials have been developed over a long period of time, trialled and reviewed in remote tribal settlements in AP, their tribal teachers trained and supported with relevant and interesting supervision and additional training. A group of teachers from AP undertook action research activities in their schools recently, showing that AS instructors can be developed through training to a high level. For remote communities such schools, specifically designed for multi-grade teaching, are likely to be the most effective in the foreseeable future.

A particular focus for AS inputs and additional educational opportunities is amongst the girls of the Muslim community. These children are largely educated in local maktabs or madrasas where the curriculum is very limited, religious texts are the main materials and education is very didactic and non-active. UPDPEP is supporting an extra three hours of schooling in the maktabs and madrasas in order to introduce the formal materials and curriculum. They also involve the teacher in local teacher training. Ongoing efforts to encourage the community to send girls to school continue. The particular needs of migrant communities need to be considered in terms of curriculum content and widening of the use of materials and maybe introduction of some life skills teaching. In Dulhera (Meerut District), a visit was made to an unsheltered school in a basti of tribal people who were metal makers and once used to supply the kings with their weapons. The children were learning alphabets in Hindi and English. Although Hindi-speaking, they also had their own language that was spoken by the teacher. The teacher was a young graduate, living in the basti and committed to teaching. There was no problem with the community. This community was vocal and the children volatile and eager. However they appeared extremely dirty and several looked ill. There was no water supply in the basti, and their habitation comprised a small wall of bricks with a thatch cover, under which the tribals kept their extraordinary decorated carts. There exists here a great opportunity for curriculum expansion and relevance, particularly for literacy. The carts were referred to as ‘their whole world – they sleep in them, store everything in them and travel in them’. Some children could sing songs in their own language. Collecting historical stories, stories about their present-day life and oral songs and stories would not only preserve a unique culture but also give relevant and powerful reading content to the children. This initiative was discussed with the teacher who has agreed to try and do this. These children are intended for
mainstream school in a few months, and the teacher will accompany them for a time. They need not only to be helped to achieve levels of health and hygiene that will make them acceptable in primary school but also to be able to retain a pride in their culture. Entering primary school with high literacy capability would also help in this transition. This kind of curriculum development would be an excellent focus for small development supported by an action research evaluation activity.

In Kirali Bhatta (Meerut), a small, unsheltered Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) school had been set up in the grounds of a brickworks. Most of the workers returned each year to the same brickworks and the owner was actively supporting the school and teacher. Some of the older children were going to the junior high school nearby and some were mainstreamed into the local primary school. Again, the learning opportunities present in the environment were great. Mathematics, science and language activities could use the children’s experience, their knowledge of two living places — West Bengal and UP — and their understanding of the processes of brick-making, building, etc. In this classroom there was no evidence of creative work using the ubiquitous clay on which the brickworks was dependent – a free and useful material for small children to use.

Working children in UP have been defined as a hard to reach group. In house-to-house surveys and liaison with employers, there have been great efforts to identify such children and to encourage them back into schooling. Bridge courses support this. However, it is unrealistic in most cases to think that all poor families will be able to bear the opportunity cost of formal schooling for one of the wage earners in their family. AS schools with flexible timings and, again, maybe a relevant curriculum that develops craft skills, awareness of health and safety issues and better education to widen employment opportunities, can all contribute towards an improvement in working children’s condition. This is an emotive issue. The United Nations Children’s Education Fund (UNICEF) Report on working children in Bangladesh is a harrowing document; however, equally harrowing is the account of many girls and boys driven to crime or prostitution as a result of the USA intervention in labour laws and the subsequent loss of jobs in factories for children under 14. It is another area where knowledge and understanding of the steps necessary to promote change need to be used.

Teachers in AS schools are often inventive and resilient because they are teaching under adverse conditions. AS schools contain children of all different ages and abilities, including some children not properly socialised for schooling. A positive step would be to encourage the use of environmental resources, both physical and human, in order to give quality and depth to the children’s learning. Continued support and training and improved relevance in the AS curriculum will help to ensure that quality education is made available to children in these schools. There may come a point where some distinction would need to be made between schools that will be necessary in the foreseeable future because of infrastructure and remoteness and those that should, eventually, be brought into the formal system. In Bangladesh, the ongoing tension between large NGOs, with more schools between them than the government, and the failure of the government to build sufficient schools, train sufficient teachers and ensure quality in their schools, indicates what can happen when the non-formal sector passes the government in quality and provision.
Research and Evaluation Studies

There has been a great improvement in DPEP official data regarding the position in states in terms of enrolment, retention, dropouts and project inputs. The current 2001 documentation is impressive in scope, design and production. It provides coherent and well-organised information, which must be of great help to planners. The improved Education Management Information System (EMIS) at state and district level now captures data that includes gender disaggregation and other critical information. In districts, there are now household surveys that emanate from the local level, with data on individual children and families; this is used in micro-planning and school development plans.

A series of studies in English were available to the fourteenth JRM, including reconstructed cohort studies and some more qualitative studies on Teacher Training and Gender. The quality of these studies is variable and some of them fail to give objective assessments that would be helpful in planning. There is a disappointing lack of critical analysis and the data collection is pedestrian and unlikely to have given in-depth information.

Development in the area of research and evaluation studies might be looked at in two ways. There is a need for overview, critical studies that are able to collect a wide variety of information from a wide variety of information sources and then to categorise and analyse in such a way that trends and potential points for development become clear. Such studies require a wide knowledge of social development issues and the context of education as well as educational input. There is such a wealth of talent in the social development sector in India that it would seem a positive move to have some collaborative efforts in which mutual skills and understanding can be used to create studies that have ‘thick’ meaning and produce focused and critical findings. Equally, in the NGOs there exists capacity for undertaking studies, particularly of gender. Some such studies already exist and are useful to mission members. DPEP has now passed the stage where it needs to be anxious about adverse findings; maturity of the project means that these can be viewed in the light of the project progress as a whole. Findings that pinpoint areas of weakness or failure can be particularly useful in adjusting programme inputs and direction.

The second area where there could be growth is in bottom-up, participatory studies from the field. The voice of the teacher, parent and child are mostly missing from current studies, except where they serve to support a hypothesis or add a dimension to a quantitative finding. Efforts to include teachers in AP, MP, Delhi and Rajasthan in Action Research Studies have had some success, although the planned integration of these into a national network has not yet taken place. Working with teachers, including AS teachers in many countries, convinces that there is a need to enable them to express their ideas and feelings. These drive many teachers and they are capable, with good support, of making a real contribution to the data relating to change and development. In India, the NGOs have wide experience of participatory processes. Flexible timing for AS schools, community perception, the actuality of the life of the working child – these are all susceptible to capture through participatory processes such as calendars, matrix ranking, small studies, logging and focused discussion groups. It would be interesting and exciting to see such small initiatives being taken up across India. The information generated could also be

used by academics to produce quality in wider studies.

DPEP is at a stage where reflective processes should be in use continuously. Counting completers and dropouts gives us important but limited information; tracker and tracer studies, and small case studies of children, schools and teachers reveal lives, aspirations and problems and the quality information that projects need in order to develop depth and relevance.

**Conclusion**

The opportunity to reflect on recent visits and to make comparisons with other projects and experiences of earlier pre-DPEP projects has been salutary. It has been interesting to realise, during the process of writing, how much the issue of gender and women and girls’ progress in education is a constant underlying theme in Asian countries. In particular, the development of community strength and, perhaps more importantly, community understanding of educational issues has been impressive and shows the way forward to other countries where this level of community involvement is not so strong. The development of diverse AS schools is now a rich patterning across India and future studies of teachers and curriculum in these schools will provide important information to support other countries struggling with diverse populations and scattered habitation. I look forward to the flourishing of research studies and participatory action research that will enable us to hear the voices at the grassroots level.

DPEP continues to progress and to grow. It makes the inevitable mistakes, it has its critics and detractors, but nevertheless remains an amazing programme, now stretching across almost the whole of the vast Indian subcontinent - and reaching villages and children who have never before been invited into the learning community.
### Glossary of Abbreviations and Indian Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSA</td>
<td>Assistant Basic Shiksha Adhikari</td>
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<td>AP</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
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<td>AS</td>
<td>Alternative Schooling</td>
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<td>Basti</td>
<td>Settlement</td>
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<td>BRAC</td>
<td>Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee</td>
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<td>BRC/CRC</td>
<td>Block and Cluster Resource Centres</td>
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<td>BSA</td>
<td>Basic Shiksha Adhikari</td>
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<td>CLIP</td>
<td>Concentrated Learning Improvement Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMO</td>
<td>Child-centred MLL Oriented</td>
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<td>DIET</td>
<td>District Institute of Education and Training</td>
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<td>DPEP</td>
<td>District Primary Education Project</td>
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<td>ECCE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Care and Education</td>
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<td>EGS</td>
<td>Education Guarantee Scheme</td>
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<td>EMIS</td>
<td>Education Management Information System</td>
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<td>EVS</td>
<td>Environmental Studies</td>
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<td>GOI</td>
<td>Government of India</td>
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<td>GOUP</td>
<td>Government of Uttar Pradesh</td>
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<td>IDA</td>
<td>International Development Agency</td>
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<td>IED</td>
<td>Integrated Education of the Disabled</td>
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<td>JRM</td>
<td>Joint Review Mission</td>
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<td>Maa Beti Melas</td>
<td>Mother-daughter fairs</td>
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<td>Maktabs and Madrasas</td>
<td>Centres of religious instruction for Muslim Communities</td>
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<td>MDCA</td>
<td>Model Development Cluster Approach</td>
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<td>MLL</td>
<td>Minimum levels of Learning</td>
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<td>MP</td>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
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<td>NPE</td>
<td>National Policy on Education</td>
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<td>Pradhan</td>
<td>Village head</td>
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<td>RVEF</td>
<td>Rishi Valley Education Foundation</td>
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<td>SCERT</td>
<td>State Council for Educational Research and Training</td>
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<td>SM</td>
<td>Shiksha Mitra (para-teacher)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPO</td>
<td>State Project Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>TLM</td>
<td>Teaching-Learning Material</td>
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<tr>
<td>TPR</td>
<td>Teacher-Pupil Ratio</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nation Children’s Education Fund</td>
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<td>UP</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>UPBEP</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>VEC</td>
<td>Village Education Committee</td>
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