

# LearnIng CURVE



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A Newsletter from  
Azim Premji Foundation  
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## From Azim Premji Foundation

The 'voucher system' has been in the news for sometime now. Its proponents are talking about 'making choices available' to parents for schooling of their children. While the middle and upper class in urban areas have a choice of both the schools and money power, the disadvantaged groups have to make do with what is available - mostly free government schools - even if the parents aspire to give the best education for their children. The voucher system, supposedly, gives such parents the economic freedom to send their children to the school of their choice - perhaps a private school. This is also seen as a step towards greater 'empowerment' of these disadvantaged sections. Further, they also argue that the Government having their responsibility to provide quality education to all does not mean that it should engage in doing all of it by itself. It can surely facilitate if someone else is providing such education.

But the opponents of this system cry foul. They see this as a backdoor attempt at privatization of school education, ultimately leading to the winding up of the government schooling system. They argue that the private schools, particularly in rural areas, are ill equipped to provide quality education - inadequate infrastructure, no play grounds, poorly paid staff, unqualified or under qualified teachers etc. These private schools are seen only as money making ventures, very often 'family ventures' with no social purpose. Further, the opponents feel that by introducing the voucher system, the Government is absolving itself of its responsibility to provide free and quality education to all. There are instances of private schools being set up by family members of government school teachers. Many government teachers also teach in the private school at convenient times. Ironically many of these very opponents send their children to private schools!

Many of the points raised by the opponents of the voucher system are true, especially those relating to infrastructure, teacher qualifications, poor pay etc. Yet, parents can it afford, gladly take their children away from government schools and admit them to private schools because they believe private schools are better. But, do private schools really provide better education?

Some research studies indicate that the learning levels among children in private schools are higher than in government schools. The opponents are, however, quick to point out that 'this is comparison of unequals'. Their contention is that the private schools, to begin with, have children from the relatively more privileged background, with educated (or at least literate) parents who can provide better environment at home. There is some merit in this argument because it is well accepted that social background can play a significant role in a

child's learning. The other side of the picture, however, is the line of thought that if the government schools are genuinely better equipped, with better qualified teachers who are well trained, can they not overcome this limitation?

The debate is endless. But with private schools mushrooming across the land, there is clearly a need to assess their performance vis-à-vis government schools, maintaining the 'level playing field'. Realizing the need for systematic data on the subject, Azim Premji Foundation is carrying out a scientifically designed study to find answers to many of these questions. The longitudinal study is being implemented with the support of a state government in several villages across a few districts. Randomized evaluation methodology is being used, which is considered the best approach to address these complex questions. Under this, randomly identified economically disadvantaged rural households are offered scholarship for their children to attend the school of their choice - it could be a private school in the area, if they so choose (the eligible children excluded by the randomization process form the 'control group'). The economic limitation of these parents exercising their preferred choice is thus almost eliminated. The five-year study design includes independent evaluation of the target children as well as other children both in the private and government schools in the region and also other parameters relating to schools. This is expected to generate rich data that will enable an objective evaluation of many of the variables that have been the subject matter of debates on school choice.

Interestingly, during the implementation of the pilot phase recently, we had anticipated resentment from parents of children who were not offered the scholarship. However, the experiment was extremely well received by parents and the village panchayat members. The transparent process and the methodology followed have been appreciated by the communities. However the teachers' unions saw this as an attempt to close down government schools.

The details of the experiment, its design, the unbiased nature of the study and utility of the findings were shared with them. The union leaders understood and even appreciated the fact that the data and analysis generated could be useful. Yet, they said they would 'oppose' the study on grounds of ideology!

We believe that the battle is not against private schooling or government schooling system but against our inability to provide quality education to the sections that are the most underserved.

*DD Karopady*  
*Head, Research and Documentation*

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# GUEST COLUMN

## The Place of Arts in Education

UR Ananthamurthy\*



*Schools should be a place where you allow the arts, where you make use of the skills which are already there in children.*

When I recently visited a school in my village, Tirthahalli, I was requested to teach a class.

The children were very diffident and needed to be prompted and encouraged to tell a story. One particular boy stood out. He told a story, of course, but I remember him because he used several languages and dialects to tell it. He was a Sindhi child whose family had settled down in Karnataka, so he freely and unselfconsciously used all the languages he was familiar with. To me, he was the most intelligent child in the school.

As a teacher, and a practical man, I would like to change two things: first, the very concept of "intelligence". We are now concerned with the vast number of children who drop out of schools in all the backward areas. This happens because there is a different kind of abstract thinking and information generation that we teach in schools which cannot be handled by a large number of children who live very simply, close to nature. These are the children who fail. If the arts are brought in such as singing, dancing, storytelling I am convinced there would be fewer dropouts because these activities are joyful. Children enjoy them. And there is a bit of these forms in every child. Most children play with words, for instance. Words are not instrumental for them, as they may be for adults. They are things to play with. Thus, work itself must be projected as joyful; work must be joyful. This is because the energy, creativity and expressions for any purpose produce joy, and joy is something that produces knowledge. Many mathematicians, for instance, do mathematics because it gives them immense joy. When the concept of intelligence includes only mathematical and linguistic skills, and only these are assessed at the cost of other intelligences then it is a problem. All other skills should also be assessed as intelligence. This will be a revolution in primary schools.



There is no point in debating whether the arts should be extra-curricular or co-curricular; they must be part of the curriculum.

Schools should be a place where you allow the arts, where you make use of the skills which are already there in children. Assessment must be of the skills required for capitalism; but they must also assess skills which are necessary for living. As a teacher, I always felt that my job was to produce a current against the main current. I chose to read and teach books which would make students think differently from what other people think - for example, *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens. Teachers have to be taught to do this to encourage children who will be capable of critiquing and criticizing the system and of going against it when necessary.

A child spends a lot of time in school and this is why the arts should be integrated into the curriculum. One way to do this is through storytelling. Panchayats should identify old men and women who are good storytellers and they can become roving teachers, going from school to school as "resource persons", telling stories to children.



In trying to improve the quality of education, we must also think about what influences children's minds. Nowadays, most children watch television. We must learn to engage with television in our environment. Look at how literature became a discipline. When the printing press came into existence and books began to become available on a mass scale, everyone began to read, and people began to discuss what they read. Hence the critical study of what people read became a subject in schools. We must learn from this by setting aside some time every day in class to discuss what children have watched the previous day on television. Critical skills can be developed by the assessment they make of their own experiences watching various programmes what they liked, what they disliked, what was "good", what was "bad". Otherwise television will be very damaging for obvious reasons. Good schools must also have libraries with audio visual material, in addition to books, particularly in urban areas where the invasion of television is much more.

One point I must emphasize is something that has become a passion for me for the past so many years that I speak about it

\*This is an excerpt of the address delivered at the National Learning Conference 2007

## GUEST COLUMN



everywhere. We must push for common schools, at least up to the tenth standard. There is a crisis in education because of the proliferation of private schools which teach in English, where other children are from the same class and background. This homogeneity is hardly a learning environment for children. And if children don't learn from their environment, they don't learn anything. You will not come across the real intelligence of this country which lies with the marginalized and repressed groups. I am not romanticizing them. They have other knowledge- of songs, different dance forms, crafts and we need to bring this knowledge into our system. How is this possible without ensuring the diversity in the classrooms and the schools themselves? In a country of such diversity, if children can learn and grow together until they are about fourteen years of age, then this is not a romance but a revolution! 50% of all private school seats must be given to children from the immediate neighborhood, regardless of background of the children, and the government should pay for the education of those who cannot afford the fees of such private schools.

The second idea which we should change is how we conceptualize school itself. It is not a place where knowledge is imparted but where it is created. The fact that the earth has gravity is not just information for a child, but something that

is experienced and therefore becomes knowledge this is the first time she is confronting this knowledge.

When we talk about assessment, I think we should abolish the SSLC examination and have continuous assessment not just of the child but also self-assessment by the teacher. There are children who are slow learners in some subjects but very quick in others. Once a minimum, survival level of all basic subjects is attained (and I include mathematics in this), once the level of knowledge has been achieved where the child can live as a civilized being in this world then the child must be free to pursue those interests or subjects she is particularly good at or is interested in. Extraordinary aptitude for, or interest in, something should not be constrained by the system but channeled by it.

Someone remarked recently, I think it was Sunil Ganguly, that soon all the fortunate people will learn English, become anglicized, and be unable to speak or understand any other language.

The Sindhi boy who told a story in so many languages will become a rarity.

*UR Ananthamurthy, a recipient of the prestigious Jnanpith Award, is a leading contemporary writer and critic in Kannada language and considered as one of the most important representatives of the Navya movement.*



# GUEST COLUMN

## Arts Education

Akshara KV\*



*Culture is not something that needs to be 'taken care of' while undertaking development projects.*

When we talk about education and equity, we are actually talking about two kinds of equity which are necessary:

1. Equal opportunity for all to get education
2. Equal opportunity for different kinds of and concepts of education

The former is easily understood, and there are at least attempts to achieve it. The latter is difficult to comprehend, and is largely ignored in our context.

Similarly there are two possibilities when we talk of the relationship between arts and education; the major question that troubles me is the choice between "arts education" and "arts-in-education" (or arts for education). Thus nowadays we talk about "theatre education" and "theatre-in-education" and the like.

Arts-in-education is very popular, and is seen as the cure for various diseases today such as for making educational processes more lively, to lure the uneducated into the fold of education etc. It is also a component of the 'holistic' approach to education. Arts education, in contrast, is perceived to be a 'specialisation', and therefore marginalised in our context.

In this context, therefore, my proposition is for arts education, not arts-in-education. The approach at present seems to prioritize the latter, and I find serious conceptual and practical problems here. The rest of my presentation discusses these problems in the context of 'Education/Equity/Arts' relationship.

There are three problems that I locate in the concept of Arts-in-Education as it is conceived and practiced today:

1. Instrumental Use of the Arts

To interrogate and defy some received notions (of 'modernity'), I would assert that arts are NOT carriers, arts are NOT tools. To put it more succinctly, culture is NOT something that needs to be 'taken care of' while undertaking development projects. Other examples within this approach are yoga for stress management. This

is not just simplification, but a conceptual violence. At the risk of sounding like the "art for art's sake" position, one must assert today: Theatre IS education; Theatre is NOT an aid to education

2. Compartmentalisation

The best examples are the western 'Theatre in Education' or TIE models. Specialisation is the major motivation here. Just as medicine: paediatrics, theatre: TIE. It parallels the offer of different kinds of theatres for different age groups. The underlying assumption is that children are DIFFERENT from adults. Therefore, you need different kinds of arts for them. And we have now lobbies for including 'drama' as a subject in schools, and there are TIE projects all over the country. It is like saying 'Indian' way of thinking is different. Children may only respond differently but essentially they are NOT different.

3. Dominance of Literacy

Why only 'literacy'? Why NOT 'musicacy' or 'theatricacy'? Is learning to keep Swara and Tala as important as learning to read and write alphabets? The highhandedness of 'literacy-centred-education' is revealed in, for example, the Union budget where the ratio of money allotments for Education: Culture = 28:1. How many music/dance/drama schools do we have compared to school and colleges? Literacy is thus something like a neo-imperialist tool with its emphasis on primary education and its deprivileging of specialised education. Why? To create CONSUMERS who are LITERATE, but not EDUCATED. Compare Sa-Akshara = literate with Sa-Rasa = one who has developed sensibilities = 'Educated'

Therefore, we need to rethink all the three keywords: Education, equity, and arts/culture

Ivan Illych said: "Modern education has replaced learning FROM the world, with learning ABOUT the world." The recent developments in our context, has gone a step further. We need not even learn about the world, we need to learn only to survive. This is the tragedy of modern education.

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\*This is an excerpt of the address delivered at the National Learning Conference 2007

# MUSINGS

## Art education -Potential and Problem

*Umashanker Periodi*

*Art education has a very high potential for providing space to children and teachers to learn in a non-threatening, non-competitive, non-violent and friendly atmosphere.*

Drama and me -The celebration



One thing that I remember from my primary school days is the school day celebrations and the performances in which I had participated. There was something magical for us children

in those celebrations. It was different from the usual school days. It was relaxed, we were all involved in something concrete to do, the gap between the senior students, the teachers and us was considerably reduced and above all, as a team, we were working towards something wonderful. The atmosphere was of exploring, finding out and creating. It is in those rehearsals that the bond between the team members was built and a strong feeling of unity took form. The appreciation that we would receive after the performance from our own friends and from others would give us immense joy and satisfaction. In those days of celebrations the school wore a changed look a school that we liked! I often wonder as to what was so special in that school day celebrations...

Drama and the community : The school day teacher

I remember that my village school was not considered a 'good school'. Students from our school were not accepted in neighbouring higher primary or high schools. Their complaint was that the children were 'dull' and did not know anything. All this changed when a new teacher joined our school. When the teacher set foot into our school, we boasted of having only one room and a single assistant teacher. On her retirement, 15 years later, the school had a different story to tell. With 15 teachers, 8 rooms and a full fledged stage for performances, we were the envy of many! The attitude towards children from our school changed dramatically in that time span. This teacher was the first to start the ritual of school day celebrations. Parents were invited to watch their children perform drama on stage and hold exhibitions in school, with equal ease. They were overjoyed to see their children performing. The old students slowly organized themselves into an association and started working with the head teacher

for the betterment of the school. The 'betterment committee' came together and it started managing things for the school. School upgradation, bolstering of existing infrastructure and obtaining schemes from the Government - it were all happening in our school. Initially the parents came only for the school day celebrations but gradually increased their involvement. The entire change was brought in a decade. My people say that all this was done through the school day celebrations. Till date the teacher is remembered as the school day teacher.

Drama- Assessment or appreciation

Recently during the KSQAO assessment I witnessed the challenging process of assessing schools in yoga, project work, sports, and other "art education" aspects. It was very difficult for the evaluators to evaluate these aspects of art education and do a good job of it. Everyone I spoke to in the field agreed that it was a very bold and necessary step in making educational assessment holistic and meaningful but would invariably lead to discussions on the limitations of such an assessment. The teachers equipped with some knowledge of art education remarked that to assess art education it was essential to develop authentic and specific assessment tools which were different from the tools devised to assess 'subjects'. The school teachers quipped that these evaluators could only evaluate the subject content and would be unable to do justice to art education. They opined that since arts education was subjective it was almost beyond assessment. The teachers also put forth the argument that something like a drama could not be evaluated as the process of evolving the production was far more critical than the product (drama) itself. The dynamics which build the child and the team has to be considered before, during and after the drama. I heard a teacher saying that presenting yoga for somebody to assess, goes against the very essence of yoga! But it is also true that if this is not assessed it will not be taught. It becomes extra curricular, outside syllabus, outside school and outside learning. Yet my personal experience says that art education has a very high potential for providing space to children and teachers to learn in a non-threatening, non-



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competitive, non-violent and friendly atmosphere. There are also teachers who argue that to make art education fruitful and fun it has to be kept outside the purview of the examination!

The challenge before us is two fold: First, that art education should not be considered cumbersome by the mainstream educators and hence should not get neglected. Second, creating space for art education would break existing social hierarchies which may be of interest to very few members of the upper class and caste.

The challenge : Art as an extra

This particular branch is so important in helping the child understand herself and the immediate surrounding- if one looks at the core aims of education. The sensitivity, the flexibility to human relations etc is easily possible through arts education. But in reality it is looked down upon by the teachers, parents and experts. Teachers are not encouraged to seriously engage themselves in this branch of education and those who do, are themselves not taken seriously. The children who participate in art are often discouraged and told to focus on 'subjects' and here that often means rote learning!



We need to figure out what needs to be done to bring art to mainstream education without losing its great capacity and flexibility to nurture imagination, freedom of thought and scope for

creativity. It is in art education that the Hand, Head and Heart are engaged in a meaningful construction. The limitation and lack of appropriate tools for the assessment of art education is the major hurdle in mainstreaming art education in to the curriculum and syllabus. If assessment tools are developed art education will be considered for examination and thus teaching inside the classroom will become full-fledged.

But for this to be fruitful we will have to avoid rote learning in art. How often do we see that children when asked to draw, sketch the mundane cup and saucer, bucket, the rising sun, and the hibiscus flower? The session on drama and acting would bring Gabbar Singh, Shivaji and Yecchama Naika on stage. It was Shri Gurbachan Singh of Rajya Shiksha Kendra, Bhopal who helped me understand that this was rote learning in art education. How do we avoid this? How do we mainstream the extra-curricular? How do we measure the immeasurable?

The challenge is three fold: i) developing teachers who are sensitive and resourceful; ii) developing assessment tools which take into consideration the multidimensional aspects of art; and iii) building an appreciation of and for art in the larger community. I feel that the KSQAO evaluation process and result will give us some clue to start working in this area. We will have to put together the evaluators, the evaluated and the teachers who observed the process closely to develop a tool to assess this component meaningfully.

The challenge : Me as an extra

The societal structure, its discrimination and hierarchy is recreated in schools with subtlety, but very successfully. This is very strong in the rural schools. The 'good' roles are given to children from higher caste - perhaps the Gods have to speak in a certain language with some sophistication and superiority! And inevitably the 'fringe' roles are left for the vast majority of others. This not only deprives these children of a great opportunity to learn and bloom but adds to their image of lower self esteem.

The art forms considered to be of value also generally pertains to the culture of the higher caste. Local dialect is looked down upon; folk forms are not considered as art forms and do not come anywhere closer to the classical forms. In schools one often sees just one or two star performing children being given most of the dances and the vast majority not looked at even for a small role or dance! . The teacher has to be very sensitive and imbibe the philosophy that we are not here to show case extraordinary heroes through some star performers.

This exclusion is so powerful that after three decades of my performance in Yakshagana, I could not graduate from Ravana to Rama. If these discriminations are reflections of the society, then we need to start working towards changing the society. Of course a tall order! But we will have to start some where. Can we think of a better place than primary schools? If we start seriously training sensitive and skilled teachers to work with children on art education providing space for freedom of thought, imagination, respect for others and creativity, in a non-threatening, non-competitive, non-violent and friendly atmosphere I feel that we will be contributing towards a more humane and democratic society.

*Uma Shankar Periodi is Project Leader, Learning Guarantee Programme, Azim Premji Foundation.*

# MUSINGS

## A steep learning curve

*Kanupriya Misra*

*A system will only change when the change agents take cognizance of the need for this change.*

24 months.

In these months, my experiences have been varied, diverse and sometimes even intimidating! Traveling through the various nooks and corners of the country, meeting various government officials, teachers and most importantly little school children- all of this has shaped me and moulded me so differently from what I used to be 2 years ago. The experiences I have had have been as different from each other as chalk and cheese. From being stuck in landslides for hours to an end to interacting with children despite the language barrier- the experience has been exhilarating to say the least! But what remains with me through all these experiences are the invaluable learning's I have gathered and which would probably stay with me for years to come.

It is said that India is the same between the vast expanses of the borders. This argument never really found favour with me till I stepped into the field for myself. The teachers instruct and teach each class in an identical manner. More often than not, she/one of the students read out a lesson and the students are made to repeat each line after them. Ironically, the student reading out the text can read at a much faster rate than the teacher themselves. Amidst all this, the silver lining in the cloud is that there are officials and teachers who are doing their bit to orchestrate a change, a change in the right direction.

Something that I have observed is that changing a system which has been in place even before the concept of the system came about, is no child's play. The system can't be altered by changing the policies or by just hoping that our presence would make all the difference. The system would also not get transformed by just ensuring a regular inflow of money or human resources for quality development. A system will only change when the change agents take cognizance of the need for this change. The change agents must be motivated themselves and should be willing to give in their very best so that a change, irrespective of its magnitude, can be engineered. A system will change when it's every aspect is dynamic.

Another such observation that I made was through my continual visits to the schools and through repeated interactions with the government functionaries at the state

and district levels. Working with the government is an uphill challenge and only brings out the best in an individual. One needs to constantly address the debate of inertia vs. initiative. The inertia of the government has to be broken by an external initiative, but at the same time the initiative should be made keeping in mind that you are doing it as a facilitator.

During the past 2 years, I have attended various workshops and trainings with the government functionaries and teachers. I have gathered, over the various interactions, that there are no ready, available answers for each question that is raised. The government teachers and functionaries are raising questions, today, not to seek answers but just to be heard and understood by many. One does not have to answer all the questions the government functionaries are raising. Some time it might be phrased like a question but it is just a statement they wish to make. They have to ensure that the platform they have been granted to voice their opinions/misgivings be utilised effectively. Patience is a virtue we should hold very dear while working.

I must also confess here that children remain to be my biggest motivators. Each time I spend time with children I feel this burst of newfound positive energy which triggers me to work and aim even higher. They come from all walks of life; have their own struggles and battles for survival. Yet their enthusiasm and passion for learning is unquenchable. They yearn to imbibe something new from each visitor who may walk in into their classroom. They forget the hassles of home when they are in school, they just want to learn. The enormous onus which is upon the teachers for ensuring good learning of these children is unnerving but at the same time inspiring and challenging.

I have spent the past 2 years, travelling through the course of different states, seeing different geographies and cultures across the country. Despite the marked changes in the geographies, what remains unchanged is the honesty and hospitality of the people. The crumbling infrastructure of schools may have a sordid story to tell, but the respect for the teacher and the curiosity of the children between the four walls, remain the same, everywhere. That for me and many others is an encouragement and a beacon of light.

*Kanupriya is Member, Learning Guarantee Programme, Azim Premji Foundation.*

# FOUNDATION UPDATE

## A. Education Management

- 1) Capacity building among education functionaries in Karnataka state: The Foundation has been engaged in developing managerial skills of education functionaries for the past few months. The training of Master Resource Person's (MRP) continued with Canara Bank School of Management Studies (CBSMS). During the month, 58 Master Resource Persons (MRPs) went through second and third phases of training with Canara Bank School of Management Sciences.

Azim Premji Foundation and Education Department of Government of Karnataka discussed re-structuring of Policy Planning Unit and enlargement of its work scope. Based on the suggestions received, a draft of Memorandum of Understanding of Education Management Unit has been put together.

- 2) Namma Shaale (My School): The project team started collecting secondary level data at village, Grama Panchayat and cluster level available with village accountant's Grama Panchayats', Anganwadi and health workers, prior to house hold survey.

## B. Assessment Led Classroom Reforms

- 1) In Rajasthan, a 3-day teacher orientation program for the head teachers of participating schools in Tonk and Sirohi, was held in partnership with SSA



- 2) In Uttarakhand, the analysis of 2007 results was completed while only one school qualifies as Learning Guarantee Programme schools (compared to nil earlier), two-thirds of the schools have shown improvement over last year. Average class-wise improvement in scores is of the order of 10 percentage points.
- 3) Workbook Development for Rajasthan - The initial phase of work books for primary and upper primary were to be completed and ready by end May 07. The first lot of print ready master set of workbooks for Classes 1 to 8 for the specified subjects were prepared

and submitted to the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan office. Work on the second phase is getting underway. It has been a very satisfying learning experience for all members involved in the project.

- 4) In Madhya Pradesh, the results of the baseline vs. end line performance in the 15 Action Research Programme experimental schools are very encouraging there is a significant improvement in both reading and arithmetic skills of children.

## C. Computer Aided Learning

- 1) With a view to develop the Computer Aided Learning Program (CALP) team in interacting with the teachers under the new program in a much more meaningful way, the CALP team completed the CD positioning and lesson plan workshop for 19 CD's in which teachers from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka also participated.
- 2) A detailed proposal for a demonstration model for Computer Aided Learning was sent to the 14 existing states with whom we are engaged. Several states have expressed interest Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Punjab and Orissa.
- 3) An orientation for the staff of BRAC, Bangladesh was conducted in Dhaka on e-learning content creation, deployment and monitoring strategy. A three member team from the Foundation also visited ICT Agency of Sri Lanka and provided orientation to their 26 member team on creation and deployment of e-learning content in their rural knowledge centre.

## D. Technology for Education

- 1) Academics & Pedagogy team assisted with the feedback collected in the workshop of teachers held in Shorapur, Gulbarga on Digital learning material (to be used in a class room in projector mode) and further steps of evaluation have been initiated. The analysis of feedback from teachers of Gulbarga Workshop on teacher centric Digital Learning Material has also been completed.
- 2) The audio content of an NGO Adanya Chethana -



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was evaluated by our team and was found useful for Azim Premji Foundation.

- 3) The concept of multi mice technology for single monitor/terminal was developed jointly by UC Berkeley, Microsoft Research and Azim Premji Foundation. On an experimental basis the multi mice technology with its different versions of collaborative learning, competition mode and turn taking mode was successfully integrated with one our titles 'Friendly Animals'.



## E. Content Development

1. New Initiatives: The second mobile Computer Aided Learning bus design was completed and project review was carried out at IIT-Bombay with external consultants. IIT Mumbai received an award for this unique design.
2. Content creation: A CD title on Africa was also completed. On last count, the Foundation has 115 MasterCD titles in 18 languages.

## F. Research and documentation

- 1) Andhra Pradesh Randomized Evaluation Study-School Choice study : The research project has been launched in 32 villages of West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. A detailed discussion was held with the District Education Officers and the Mandal Education Officers of the district to brief them about the research. The parents of randomly identified parents were contacted and the scheme of scholarship was explained to them. A majority of the parents have agreed to participate and have also enrolled their children in private schools.
- 2) The analysis of the achievement status of the 214

indicators of Child Friendly School Initiative (CFSI) Shorapur for December 2006 has been completed and the report is ready.

## G. Education for the Migrant labour children

- 1) One more school has started operation at another site. Learnings from the first site have been put to effective use in this school. It is encouraging to see the progress being made with children, but the challenges of regular attendance of children and teacher stability remain.
- 2) More interest is being shown by other builders who have expressed a desire in starting similar initiatives on their sites. We are also interacting with NGOs working in alternative education for children of a different profile, such as Mobile Creches (Mumbai and Pune) and Saranga Trust in Bangalore.



## H. Child Friendly School, Shorapur

- 1) Workshop to develop self learning material for classes 3 & 4 was continued in May. A 13 member team from Jharkhand also joined the workshop.

## I. Advocacy

- 1) Third National Learning Conference on the theme of "Equitable education for Equitable Society" was organized from May 24-26, 2007, in Bangalore. This conference was held in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. Currently, documentation of the conference proceedings is on.



# RESEARCH UPDATE

## Is Elementary Education really free?

*Vijaylakshmi Hebbare*

There are no free lunches, economists keep reminding us. What about primary education which the government claims is free? Our Constitution enjoins upon the State to provide free elementary education to all children in the 6-14 age group. To achieve this, all State Governments have abolished tuition fees in government schools and in primary schools run by local bodies. It is also mostly free in private schools that enjoy government grants-in-aid but are run privately. Other costs of education such as textbooks, stationery, school uniforms, transport, etc. are also borne by the government mainly for primary school children belonging to SC/ST categories and girls.

But is elementary education really free? Does it mean the parents do not have to or do not incur any expenditure at all on their primary school going children?

There is limited data on household expenditures on education in India and the two main sources are - National Accounts Statistics (NAS), the data published every year by the Department of Statistics, Planning Commission on household expenditures based on the estimates made by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), and the surveys conducted by individual researchers and research organisations like Tilak (1987), Panchamukhi (1990), etc.

Tilak, JBG (2002) concludes that there is nothing like 'free' education in India. Household expenditure on education is sizeable; households from even lower socio-economic background - Scheduled Castes/Tribes, low income groups - spend considerable amounts on education, specifically elementary education, although it is expected to be provided free to all by the State. Also, even at the primary school level 'indirect' costs, such as books, uniforms and examination fees are very high and government-run schools are no exception.

An NCAER survey conducted in the early 1990s put the household expenditure per student on (free) elementary education in rural India at Rs.378, with a high of Rs.842 in Himachal Pradesh and a low of Rs.253 in Orissa. Further, it showed that per student direct expenditure on elementary education by households in rural India was substantially

different between government schools and private schools and between aided and unaided private schools (NCAER).

According to another study on the impact of the cost of primary education in rural India on school attendance ("Does Cost of Primary Education Matter: Evidence from Rural India", based NSSO survey (1998) conducted between July 1995 and June 1996) the average expenditure per student pursuing primary education in rural India for students going to local body schools, private aided school and private unaided school was Rs 223, Rs 622 and Rs. 911 per annum respectively. Cost of education varies across the states and the average expenditure per primary school student in Rural Karnataka in 1995-96 was Rs. 132 (NSSO, 1998). The NCAER (1994) and NSSO (1991, 1993) studies suggest that every year parents spend amounts ranging from Rs. 100 to Rs. 4000 per child on primary education.

It is in this background that a study was conducted by Azim Premji Foundation to find out how money was being spent by rural households in Karnataka on the primary education of their wards. The focus here was on Bidar, Gulbarga, Bijapur, Raichur, Bellary, Bagalkot, Koppal and Yadgir districts of North East Karnataka. Chronically drought prone, this area provides little scope for continuous year-round employment. Data collected from 4179 households covering 7512 children in the 6-14 age group, belonging to classes 1 to 7 was analyzed. Of the sample of children, 55% were boys and the rest were girls; 26.60% belonged to SC category, 15.85% ST category and 57.55% general category.

The field work was carried out in October 2005 by 24 area coordinators identified for the study. From each randomly identified village, the area coordinator collected household information using the questionnaire developed for the study. From each village the data was collected from 10 households. Each household had to have at least one child going to school in the age group of 6-14 years. Data gathered through questionnaires pertained to:

- 1) Socio-economic variables - sex, social status, occupation of father & mother, education of father and mother, total number of family members, number of children,

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annual income of the family- agricultural and non-agricultural; and

- 2) Expenditure incurred on education of children by class, school, and its components fee, books, stationery, uniform, transport, private tuition, sports and other activities.

For a majority of the households it was difficult to give a breakup the expenditure. Hence the analysis is limited to the estimation of overall expenditure. Only the direct costs are estimated, though an attempt is made to estimate the opportunity cost.

Household Expenditure per child, by gender and social status:

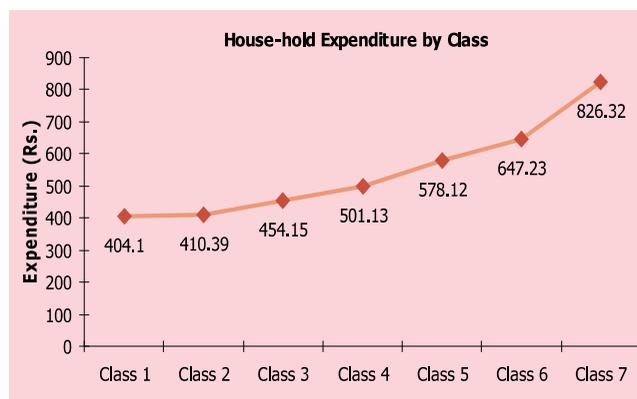
The study reveals that the average household expenditure per child per annum on elementary education in rural North East Karnataka is Rs 539.84 - Rs. 567.12 on a male child and a slightly less Rs. 506.40 on a girl child. In terms of social status the expenditure per child is: Rs. 447.36 for a Scheduled Caste child; Rs. 521.36 for a Scheduled Tribe and Rs. 593.79 for a general category child. On an average each household spends Rs 1038.29 on children's education.

Household Expenditure by type of school:

Household expenditure on education is substantially different between government schools and private schools, and between aided and unaided private schools. The difference is about Rs. 1470 between government schools and aided schools and Rs. 633 between aided schools and private schools. The average annual expenditure incurred by the household is Rs. 484.30 per child for government schools; Rs. 1954.05 for aided school; and Rs. 2587.80 for private schools.

Household Expenditure by class:

Household expenditure increases as the level of class increases. See graph above.



## 4.5 Other Findings

Do school going children in the 6-14 age group contribute to the economic activities of the family? It was found that about 10.4% children - 6.6% boys and 3.8% girls - were engaged in economic activities like baby sitting, household chores, cattle grazing, agricultural labour and non-agricultural labour, etc.

Private tuitions: About 11.8% of the children, comprising 6.9% boys and 4.9%, go to private tuitions. The average amount spent per annum on tuition is Rs. 445.12 per child Rs. 520.23 for boys and Rs. 338.50 for girls.

## Conclusion

This confirms the findings of JBG Tilak that households spend a lot on acquiring education for children even in rural India. "Household expenditures on education are quite sizeable. A typical household has to spend Rs.341 per child per year on its primary education. The corresponding figure increases to Rs.474 if the child is enrolled for upper primary education. On an average, a household has to spend as much as Rs.387 per year on acquiring free elementary education in rural schools" (JBG Tilak 2004).

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# BOOK CASE

## "Escape from Childhood" - John Holt

As any other book of John Holt, a profound thinker, prolific writer and a relentless education reformer, "Escape from childhood" is close to captivating. The book effectively brings out the most disguised and subtle forms of discrimination towards children. The examples describing the plight of children are quite disturbing and eye opening. The author discusses every problem that childhood is plagued with, and exposes us to the trials and tribulations of childhood. In that sense, Escape from Childhood is an illuminating work aiming to explore the knotty dimensions of childhood and discusses progressive ways of child upbringing.

In his book John Holt advocates a broader definition of childhood, inclusive of political and economic rights for children. The author makes a commendable effort of traveling beyond the stereo typical issues on childhood like child abuse and corporal punishments. The book urges every one to treat the child not as a child but as an adult.

He says that the discrimination towards a child is difficult to identify as it is often disguised in the form of love. He questions even gestures like cuddling a child saying that it shows disrespect to a child. The striking thought of this book is the strong denial of childhood as a wonderful dream. So long as the child is treated as the child, the child will be denied his rightful share in rights, responsibilities and resources, author asserts.

If the institution of childhood itself is not seen as an institution then we are denying them their rights, responsibilities and a meaningful role in society. He advocates twelve fundamental rights for all children: right to vote, to work, to own property, to travel, to choose one's guardian, to a guaranteed income, to legal and financial responsibility, to control ones learning, to use drugs and to drive.

John Holt advocates the right to vote for every one irrespective of age. He argues that there are no indicators to quantify the awareness levels of present day voter. By not giving their due share, he questions, how different it is from taxation without representation.

Not one to stop at that, Holt also advocates that children should be sanctioned the right to work. He says by denying children right to work, we are denying them the right to possess an independent source of income. This way the child depends on parents for every thing and remains a meek individual.

That the children may be employed in hazardous industries, or it would be an impede their education, or that the children may have to work with strange people, are all irrelevant in Holt's understanding. In fact he also questions the notion of home being a secured environment. He argues that it is work that ensures children income which can keep some of them away from

resorting to unlawful activities for money, and he urges to let the children decide for themselves whether or not education is an important activity.

His views on right to work, travel and learning are absolutely feasible, even though the state may never grant a formal right to that extent. His views on drug abuse and the relevant problems are absolutely true but what is not feasible is the solution of legalizing drugs. I couldn't appreciate the relevance of such a statement in a society which is increasingly moving towards banning cigarettes.

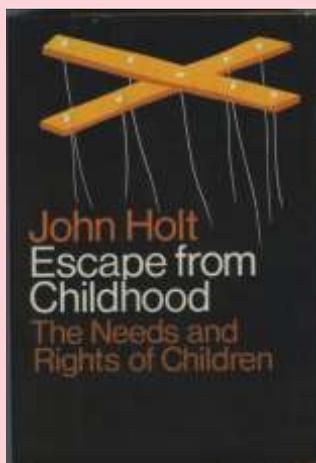
There are a lot of questions which need to be addressed and which have been left open ended by the author. For instance, John Holt doesn't mention the right to consent to sex for children. The right to control their bodies, right to sexual self-determination, and their education and empowerment to assert that right, should have been discussed by John Holt. Granting of those rights will ensure that young people have a more open and positive attitude towards sexual matters. Teenagers who feel at ease talking about sex are more likely to disclose abuse. This kind of an open environment can be critical to putting an end to the cycle of systematic exploitation.

Another striking omission is the role for teachers in creating an environment which fosters learning without compulsions for children. The role of a teacher cannot be wished away as schooling still occupies a significant portion of a child's life. It is highly unlikely that the parents embrace the "learning without schooling" idea of John Holt. Drawing from my own bitter experiences with schooling, I would completely agree with John Holts de-schooling philosophy. But I still assert that

it takes the whole pacific to flow under the bridge to get to the point of implementing de-schooling in a big way. Till then shouldn't we need to work with the teacher to make his role meaningful in the child's life? Surprisingly the author doesn't give enough space to the role of teachers corresponding to the space they occupy in the lives of present day children. Even if parents turn to that idea in big numbers down the line, till that time, the teacher will remain a force to reckon with in child's life.

There may be some blanket statements, striking omissions and some unconvincing solutions, but the book is a passionate account of childhood issues. His eloquent writing, lucid thinking, and his genuine love towards children are reflected in every line of the book. John Holt's immense interest in children helped him to bring out the minutest detail that may bother the child. John Holt's "Escape from childhood" is an essential for everyone whose lives remain intricately entwined with the development of children.

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