



## Solution Exchange for the Education Community Consolidated Reply

*Query: Institutionalising Quality Improvement in Education, from Independent Consultant, New Delhi (Advice)*

Compiled by [Amit Kaushik](#), Resource Person; additional research provided by [Sagarika Gnanaolivu](#), Research Associate  
10 October 2006

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**Original Query: Subir Shukla, Independent Consultant, New Delhi**  
**Posted: 6 September 2006**

Attainment of educational quality tends to remain an unsolved puzzle, and after 10+ years of implementation, one issue confronting many of the 'older' Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) states is - what MORE do we do now, and how do we do it DIFFERENTLY? Some of course are sceptical as to whether anything has been done at all. However, having had the opportunity to observe and participate in many state efforts, I can vouch for the serious, and often rigorous, efforts made towards the development of curricula/syllabi, detailing of an implementable version of a learner oriented pedagogy and 'TLM'. New kinds of textbooks, changes in evaluation systems, training of teachers (in some instances 'over training'), generation of resource groups at all levels, different models of Community Resource Centres (CRCs) and Block Resource Centres (BRCs), and even administrative reforms in some instances. Yet the quality attained (by whatever indicator 'measured') is not commensurate with the effort invested. Hence,

- Could it be that it is merely an implementation issue, and that the right things have not been done in the right order, and perhaps not as well as they should have been?
- Is it that reality outstripped our efforts even as we made them (e.g. student diversity increased dramatically, as did teacher diversity, but the pedagogical and training approach did not consider this)
- On the other hand, is it more a case of having, perhaps, an insufficiently articulated *theory of systemic change* behind the efforts, thus reducing them to activities that do not necessarily add up to real transition? In fact, while much attention has been paid to 'how children learn' there has been very little said on 'how teachers learn' and 'how schools / institutions/systems' themselves learn, especially in our context. Thus we advocate fairly 'advanced' educational process (e.g. constructivism) while our ability to enable teachers to learn (and perform) remains rudimentary, and our approach somewhat unsophisticated.

While the first two are indeed issues that have affected quality improvement efforts, I tend to believe the third as being the greatest barrier in attaining success, even where sincere implementation has taken place. I would be grateful for members' views on:

- whether the thesis holds water;

- if it doesn't, what they identify as key underlying issues to be addressed with regard to sustained inability to attain quality, despite efforts; and
  - If they do agree, could they please share any work/understanding on 'growth' of teachers/institutions, whether related to the Indian context or from elsewhere?
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### Responses received, with thanks from:

1. [Shabnam Sinha](#), National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi
2. [Arun Sharma](#), University College of Medical Sciences, New Delhi
3. [B. L. Kaul](#), Progressive Educational Society and Society for Popularization of Science, Jammu
4. [C. S. Nagaraju](#), RIE-NCERT, Mysore
5. [Shashi Mendiratta](#), Independent Consultant-Education, Noida
6. [Binay Pattanayak](#), Technical Support Group-SSA, New Delhi
7. [Yuman Hussain](#), Azad India Foundation, Kishanganj
8. [Mahi Pal](#), Haryana Institute of Rural Development, Nilokheri
9. [Priyanka Dale](#), PRIA, New Delhi
10. [Rajesh Kumar](#), Swayam Krishi Sangam, Hyderabad

*Further contributions are welcome!*

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### Summary of Responses

The query raised the very relevant and important issue of institutionalising quality within the education system, pointing out that barriers to improving quality remain, despite many years spent implementing elementary education programmes such as Operation Blackboard, the District Primary Education Programme, and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Members agreed that within the context of the triangular relationship between equity, quantity and quality, quality is perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing initiatives aimed at universalising elementary education.

Respondents underlined that although there has been a greater focus on the problem of access and enrolment, there is also a need to focus on the preparation and use of teaching learning materials, and **institutional reform**. As part of efforts to reform, there have been significant investments in institutional structures like Block and Cluster Resource Centres, yet they are often criticised for not being able to support teacher development, sometimes due to the assignment of numerous non-academic functions. In part, this may be due to the absence of systems to monitor the activities and outputs of such institutions.

Agreeing that “committed teachers” are an essential prerequisite for making the quality of education better, members pointed out quality is frequently dependant upon the effectiveness and nature of monitoring as well. They discussed the fact that monitoring and how it is done can

change the dynamics of the education system. Monitoring needs to be used as a mechanism for toning up classroom processes and improving the teaching-learning process, not as an inspection tool.

Suitable **monitoring and evaluation systems** are necessary to ensure that resources are appropriately utilised and teachers perform their expected roles. Respondents mentioned National Council of Educational Research and Training's (NCERT) "Monitoring Tools for Quality Dimensions" under SSA as an instrument to monitor quality in classrooms, as well as their "[Source Book on Pupil Assessment at the Primary Level](#)," which is presently being developed.

In order to make monitoring efficient, members opined there is a need to pay more attention to **participatory governance** and engage communities in school management. They noted that while SSA and other programmes have established many different types of governing structures at the village, block, and district level, they often remain weak and ineffective. Committee members from Village Education Committees (VECs), Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), etc. are often unaware of their roles and functions, and many times do not even know they are members. Moreover, administrators continue to draw up village and district education plans without involving local communities and their representatives. To a great degree, quality improvement would depend on increased local level accountability and transparency.

Members shared several **examples of innovative programmes** across the country designed to promote quality in the education system like the Learners' Achievement Tracking System in **Orissa**, Integrated Learning Improvement Programme in **West Bengal**, the Learning Assurance Programme in **Assam**, and the Karnataka State Quality Assurance Organisation in **Karnataka**. Respondents critically discussed these examples, pointing out that such cases often substitute for real and system-wide change. There needs to be a holistic approach to planning, they contended, within the ambit of the real world, rather than a piecemeal approach. Quality must be understood in terms of the distance between planning and practice, practice and funding, and evaluation and practice—the greater the distance between these variables, the poorer the quality.

At the same time, members highlighted that there have been some significant incremental improvements in education quality. Different state governments and NGOs have implemented innovative projects over the past few years. Respondents also mentioned that teachers and teacher educators have greater access to resources and exposure to other practices than previously, which has led to the development of a wider range of improved teaching and training materials. These developments indicate there has been some systemic improvement.

Instead of dramatic changes, members felt that small, planned alterations are required; even though they tend to be slower, they are far more enduring. To accomplish this type of change, respondents suggested several **strategies to improve education quality**, such as focusing on indices like mastery of basic educational tools and ability to articulate and learn. Another way is to place more emphasis on "time on learning task" - to understand how to increase this time and augment teacher capacities. They also referred to [NCERT's](#) "National Curricular Framework (NCF) 2005," which articulates several possible strategies for increasing the effectiveness of classroom processes. Additionally, introducing a school voucher system could create competition between government private schools and force government schools to improve quality. Finally, members mentioned several initiatives that are examining the learning process at different levels.

Along with discussing how to improve education quality, members raised the issue of parental perception, highlighted by a survey from [Uttar Pradesh](#), which indicated that for many parents and children education is not always the primary reason for attending schools. Parents reported

children are only attending school for other “benefits.” In such circumstance, creating awareness and motivating parents becomes as important as other quality enhancement measures.

Overall, it was emphasised that in a large country like India, the task of educating children is a vast and complex one, and the systematic improvement of quality calls for continuous and sustained levels of effort and investment.

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## Comparative Experience

### Uttar Pradesh

**Survey on Quality of Government Primary Education in Mathura district** (from [Arun Sharma](#), University College of Medical Sciences, New Delhi)

A survey conducted in six government primary schools revealed that the attendance is erratic and only 40%. In addition, the majority of first and second standard children could not read, the school registers were not accurate and the quality of the mid-day meal food extremely poor. Parents were apathetic about the situation, assuming that there will be no change; they continued to send their children to school to improve their sons' chances for a “good dowry.”

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## Related Resources

### *Recommended Documentation*

**Source Book on Pupil Assessment at the Primary Level** (from [Shabnam Sinha](#), NCERT, New Delhi)

National Council of Educational Research and Training; 2006

Click [here](#) to read document (Size: 56 KB)

*Concept note lists some major NCERT initiatives on large-scale assessment of pupils as a measure of quality of education.*

*From Sagarika Gnanaolivu, Research Associate*

### **Major Interventions for Quality Improvement Under SSA**

By Binay Pattanayak; Technical Support Group (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan)

Click [here](#) to read document

*The document lists very precisely the possible interventions under SSA for quality improvement in elementary education.*

### **Quality Concerns in Primary Education in India: Where is the Problem?**

By Yash Aggarwal; National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi; March 2000

Click [here](#) to read document (Size: 18.8 KB)

*Paper reviews the quality issues faced by the educational system in our country. It also points out the quality is being compromised for quantity.*

### **The Quality of Primary Education: A Case Study of Madurai and Villipuram Districts in Tamil Nadu, India**

By Shuchi Grover and Nishu Harpreet Singh; Center for International Development, Harvard University; April 2002

Click [here](#) to read document (Size: 1.5 MB)

*Study identifies and analyzes the processes that affect attendance, completion, and repetition, focusing on the learning environment*

### **Organizing for Quality Primary Education for Children from Poor Families: The Design Principles and Lessons from Gyan Shala Project, India**

By Pankaj S. Jain; Education Support Organization

Click [here](#) to read document

*Reports on programmes that provides assured quality primary education to poor children in a developing country context, financed from local sources on a sustained basis*

### **Primary Education in India: Quality and Coverage Issues**

By Nirupam Bajpai and Sangeeta Goyal; Center on Globalization and Sustainable Development, The Earth Institute at Columbia University, Working Paper No. 11; February 2004

Click [here](#) to read document (Size: 187 KB)

*Paper analyzes the state of primary education in India by looking at the educational outcomes, both in terms of quantity and quality from different states.*

### **Scaling up Primary Education Services in Rural India: Public Investment Requirements and Policy Reform: Case Studies of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh**

By Nirupam Bajpai, Ravindra H. Dholakia and Jeffrey D. Sachs; Center on Globalization and Sustainable Development, The Earth Institute at Columbia University, Working Paper No. 28; November 2005

Click [here](#) to read document (Size: 917 KB)

*Study deals with scaling up of rural services in primary education and the policy, institutional and governance reforms necessary to ensure proper service delivery*

### **The Improvement of Primary School Quality in India: Successes and Failures of Operation Blackboard**

By Caroline Dyer; Edinburgh Papers in South Asian Studies, No. 4; 1996

Click [here](#) to read document (Size: 274 KB)

*Examines teachers' responses to the teaching-learning aid component of project- argues policy innovation can only be successful if teachers' capacities are accurately assessed*

### **Primary Education: Progress and Constraints**

By V. Ratna Reddy, R. Nageswara Rao; The Economic and Political Weekly; March 22-29, 2003 (free registration required)

<http://www.epw.org.in>

*Paper looks at various aspects of education in an effort to pinpoint the reasons for the poor performance of the sector in Andhra Pradesh.*

### **Empowering Parents to Improve Education: Evidence from Rural Mexico**

By Paul Gertler, Harry Patrinos and Marta Rubio-Codina; World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3935; June 2006

Click [here](#) to read document (Size: 334KB)

*Mexico's school-based management in rural, disadvantaged schools is part of a large Compensatory Education Program, aimed at empowering parent associations*

*From Amit Kaushik, Resource Person*

### **Teacher Development: Making an Impact**

By Helen J. Craig, Richard J. Kraft and Joy Du Plessis; USAID and World Bank; November 1998

Click [here](#) to read document (Size: 11.5 MB)

*Study looks at impact of teacher education on learning; effectiveness; trends in teacher development; recruitment & retention of teachers; incentives; evaluation & supervision*

### **Effective Schooling in Rural Africa: Frequently Asked Questions About Effective Schooling in Rural Communities**

World Bank; December 2000

Click [here](#) to read document (Size: 2.8 MB)

*Document provides guidelines for affective schooling*

### **Interventions and Learning Abilities 'Read India Project in Maharashtra'**

The Economic and Political Weekly; January 8, 2005 (free registration required)

<http://www.epw.org.in/showIndex.php>

*Article discusses accelerated reading technique in schools introduced by an NGO shows that if children are taught properly, their academic abilities can improve substantially*

### **Constructivism: Point- Counterpoint and the Dilemma of the Textbook Writer**

By Shabnam Sinha; National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)

[http://ncert.nic.in/sites/unesco/Constructivismnam/constructivism/constructivism\\_point.pdf](http://ncert.nic.in/sites/unesco/Constructivismnam/constructivism/constructivism_point.pdf) (Size: 3 MB)

*Article points out the critical approaches to constructivism for school curriculum writers.*

### **The Experiences with Educational Quality Assessment and Its Use**

National Council of Educational Research and Training, 23 June 2006

[http://ncert.nic.in/sites/Variables/DEE\\_23jun/6.pdf](http://ncert.nic.in/sites/Variables/DEE_23jun/6.pdf) (Size: 86KB)

*Document lists significant government and non-government programmes in the country, which aim at enhancing educational performance and strives at quality improvement.*

### **Global Campaign for Education– More Teachers Needed**

UNICEF; April 24, 2006

[http://www.unicef.org/india/education\\_1551.htm](http://www.unicef.org/india/education_1551.htm)

*Article on a project working to develop and demonstrate a replicable model of quality education, will demo its impact on attendance, completion and learning.*

### **The Learning Guarantee Programme**

Azim Premji Foundation, Bangalore

[http://www.azimpremjifoundation.org/monographs/lgp\\_n.htm](http://www.azimpremjifoundation.org/monographs/lgp_n.htm)

*Note on the programme that recognizes and rewards schools, which meet identified enrolment, attendance and learning achievement criteria*

### **National Achievement Surveys for Elementary Education**

National Council of Educational Research and Training

<http://ncert.nic.in/sites/dee/dee.htm>

*Note examines Council's achievement surveys and attempts to develop Systemic Quality Index, to help state governments and other institutions to interpret the outcomes*

## ***Recommended Organizations***

### **National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi** (from [Binay](#)

[Pattanayak](#), Technical Support Group-SSA, New Delhi)

<http://ncert.nic.in/welcome.htm>

*NCERT proposes connecting knowledge outside school, ensuring learning shifts away from rote methods, enriching the curriculum so that it goes beyond textbooks etc.*

*From Sagarika Gnanaolivu, Research Associate*

**UNICEF, New Delhi**

<http://www.unicef.org/india/index.html>

*UNICEF supports the SSA to ensure all children have access to quality education and complete a full course of elementary schooling*

**Azim Premji Foundation, Bangalore**

[info@azimpremjifoundation.org](mailto:info@azimpremjifoundation.org); <http://www.azimpremjifoundation.org/>

*Foundation's programmes aim to create an effective and scalable model that improves the quality of learning in rural schools.*

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## Responses in Full

**Shabnam Sinha, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi**

The query posed by Subir is perhaps the greatest challenge facing the Universal Elementary Education (UEE) initiative in the millennium- the vehicles may be different- the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) or the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The entire debate has a very dynamic base within the embedded reality of the triangle of education- quality, quantity and equity.

1. The problem of numbers still haunt us- the deadline of having all children in school or alternative centres has passed and could not be met. The deadline has been advanced! Dropouts still exist- are they not also a reflection of the sadly lacking quality in schools that make children drop out. This is also an issue that needs to be addressed with immediacy for it is reflective of a systemic malaise that needs to be plugged.
2. The focus therefore, very naturally shifts to the issue of quality again. The materials for teaching, the Teacher Learning Material (TLM) and the teaching learning processes had been dismal. The NCERT has taken up efforts to bring out materials that attempt to bring about a vast improvement in the area. However, these need to be translated into actual classroom teaching with concerted efforts in the sector.
3. The institutional structures created for meeting the needs of quality improvement at the district and sub-district levels like the Block Resource Centre (BRCs) and the Community Resource Centres (CRC's) are under the weight of responsibilities that are often beyond the role that was originally envisaged for them- that was of teacher development and onsite support for improving the classroom performance of teachers. Assigning of non-academic responsibilities often sap the strength and the spirit of the functionaries. A note of caution though! At times, many of the educational functionaries are found to be actually enjoying the non-academic work- the associated sense of 'power' perhaps gives them a high of a different kind. CRC Coordinators are completely inadequate in numbers to staff the number of schools assigned to them, which in some states is as high as 40 when the ideal number envisaged was 10-12. CRC's need to be recruited urgently.

What emerges is a problem that would appropriately be referred to as a problem of 'quality' of teacher accountability, systemic readiness, pupil achievement and associated concerns and above all, a need for a social audit of the programme during its implementation. Someone had cynically mentioned that '**What gets monitored- gets done**' unfortunately, we seem to have reached a stage where the cynical pronouncement seems to be emerging as a fearful prophesy getting

realized. The system needs a strong dose of monitoring to get the basics right. The semantics of the term **monitoring** needs to be looked at its most benign and non-supervisory dimensions. Monitoring is here to be seen as having with the purpose of shaking the somnolent system into some kind of self-introspection. This would help in taking constructive steps to ensure that the schools function, the teachers teach, the classroom processes are dynamic and vibrant, learning achievements improve and the community as a vigilant stake-holder keeps a watchful eye on the entire dynamics of the educational machinery.

Coming to the specific question posed by Subir, not all is lost. There are glimpses of the positive aspects both in national innovations and in international experiences. Innovative efforts by vigilant states have yielded good results just as creative initiatives by NGOs show good result though in smaller pockets. The need at the moment is to support the national and the state governments in taking their onerous responsibilities forward by large and now responsive and responsible corporate sector. The Corporate Social Responsibility profile that each company is painstakingly building up needs to focus on institutional reform rather than on supporting scattered interventions of NGOs in small pockets. This would result in the impact that we need and crave for at present. International experiences in the Latin American countries and South Africa have shown that learner achievement and systemic reform are closely interlinked and these can be improved with community support and mentoring.

Subir has asked about specific 'work' that is happening. Some modest initiatives have been taken up by the NCERT. The NCERT has prepared a set of **Monitoring Tools for Quality Dimensions under SSA** that is being implemented by the whole country by the Government of India. A process is also on to develop a **Source Book on Learning Assessment at the Primary Level** that would come out with some assessment markers and criteria that would assess children in a manner that helps soften the whole process, providing space for them to construct knowledge in their individual ways and yet be positively assessed for any divergent and lateral creative thinking and learning process that they may follow. The quality debate will hopefully generate more heat and register positive gains, for the horizon is full of promise.

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### **Arun Sharma, University College of Medical Sciences, New Delhi**

Mr. Subir Shukla's questions gave me an opportunity to share my recent experiences with you. As a public health person, I along with my team of doctors am carrying out a prospective cohort study on the impact of mid-day meal program on growth and development of primary school children in government schools of Mathura district, Uttar Pradesh. I have the following observations to make about the quality of primary education that we saw there:

- In general, children go to school for uniforms, scholarship money and the mid day meal. Education is not the priority. It is evident from our findings that majority of first and second standard children are unable to identify even Hindi alphabets. We discovered this while trying to check their vision using Snellen's chart.
- In six schools, there were two teachers each for five classes. I fail to understand, how two of them manage to teach five different classes. The only way teachers could control the children was physical force. The use of a stick for disciplining the children is rampant
- Average attendance is only 40%, but if there is any special program or inspection in the school, guardians are informed to send their children. However, attendance registers show 90% attendance every day. Even teachers say that do not go by the register.
- We need data on date of birth of the children, but birth dates are recorded arbitrarily just to meet the eligibility criteria. In any class, a large number of children shared the birthday. Most common birth dates were 1st January, 26th January, 1st August, 15th



- August. Apparently, January and August are the cut off months that suit minimum age for admission.
- Most of the schools have two classrooms, reserved for the fourth and fifth standard, other classes are held in the open. Any kind of cleanliness is out of the question. In fact, children from two different classes some times sit together in the courtyard.
  - Distribution of midday meal is another pathetic story. Often, it is plain "khichdi" or "boiled rice" of lowest quality. The quantity is barely 30-40 gms (Govt. provides for 100 gms of cereals per child per day and Re 1 to the village head for providing mid-day meals). Some villagers have forbidden their children to eat the mid day meals.

We held informal discussion with villagers. Following observations were worth noting: The most important purpose of education according to some of them was to get a good dowry for their sons. A class 12 certificate ensures a motorcycle in dowry with cash Rs. 100, 000. A class 10 certificate may fetch a bicycle only. The price of passing in class 12 exams is Rs. 5000 per subject (negotiable) and the price of cheating is Rs. 300-500 per paper.

Most of the villagers are dissatisfied with the quality of teaching but do not want to take up the issue with authorities, assuming that nothing will improve. Parents prefer children to help in domestic and agriculture work over going to school. One of the villagers said that they do not have money to bribe officers for jobs, so what is the point in getting our children educated. They also said that once they are educated they will not like to stay in the villages and said that they however may not find a job in the cities due to the lack of money (bribe) and contacts.

Overall, the scenario appeared very bleak, but I want to mention one silver lining. In one school in Sonkh village, we found committed teachers, well-behaved students, who were definitely more knowledgeable compared to rest of the 13 villages that we went to. It was a kind of an oasis, and I am yet to understand how one village stands out in terms of its teaching standards.

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### **B. L. Kaul, Progressive Educational Society and Society for Popularization of Science, Jammu**

The answer to the question lies in your last paragraph and that is 'committed teachers'. As a teacher, administrator and based on experience, I feel that the key to improvement in education lies in committed teachers and parents. It is indeed a matter of concern that villagers you talked to have a negative attitude to education and they feel their children can get nothing in life without bribing someone. Here again the role of the teacher comes in- to work outside the class room in the village and the panchayat and try to educate the people so they can shed negative thinking. Thereby s/he can create more villages like Sonkh. I am sure there are many such examples in the country. Teachers play a very vital role in the educational system.

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### **C. S. Nagaraju, RIE-NCERT, Mysore**

All the three questions are inter-related and require a larger discourse of looking at the educational policy in a holistic perspective. The empirical (as against theoretical) nature of quality has not been considered while planning quality has been. "Quality", in the ongoing stratified schooling arrangement, is the criteria of differentiation across hierarchical categories of schools to which children attend. Mr. Subir Shukla while providing the context has cited many things he had witnessed as quality related serious efforts in different parts of the country. I also agree many of those things did happen in many places over the years. However, what I have seen is the dispersed nature of such efforts both in time and space. Ironically the latest efforts in several instances of recent 'SSA' activity is to identify those who did not learn in school and compel

teachers to undertake a crash programme during vacation to make them literate under some quality guarantee slogan.

The development of curricula/syllabi, detailing of an implement-able version of a learner oriented pedagogy and 'TLM', new kinds of textbooks, changes in evaluation systems, training of teachers, generation of resource groups at all levels, different models of Community Resource Centres (CRCs) and Block Resource Centres (BRCs), and administrative reforms etc, have not taken place in the single practicing context in an inter-related way. Most often each of them are independently implemented and some of them also can be termed as cults promoted by independent consultants engaged by ambitious officers to showcase 'results' under centrally sponsored projects in different states and independently implemented as additionalities funded by external sources.

Many such projects by definition create separate strata of schools as project schools or project programmes. When I come as member of a review mission, I am always taken to different sites of education to show different kinds of problems/ interventions in the same project area. One for witnessing the working of 'Micro-planning', another for teacher training, the third for 'activity based joyful' learning, the fourth for learner friendly environment, another for community participation, the last for novel Teacher Learning Materials (TLMs). By that time, I am exhausted. I do the hectic intellectual exercise of implementation review and give my assessment subject to further negotiations to decide what to include and not to include. The picture of 'forest' that emerges out of the edited observation of individual exotic trees from the perspectives of outsider may not reflect the real forest out there. Hence assuming that the reality outstripped our efforts is again an illusion because our understanding of reality itself is flawed.

The main question we have to address is in the realm of empirical world and not in abstraction of reality. The issue of quality is the distance between the planning and practice, the distance between the practice and funding and the distance between evaluation and practice. When such distances increase, the planning is based on caricatures of practice, funding is governed by generalized norms, and evaluation becomes quantitative. When the distances increase, the stakeholders become slices of the pie chart or percentages than distinct entities.

Realities in democratic contexts cannot be transformed in revolutionary way. Hence, our changed strategy has to focus on incremental changes of criterion indicators like mastery of basic educational tools at primary stage, ability to articulate and communicate at middle stage and learn to learn at secondary stage. We have to identify the central factor leading to the incremental change in the criterion. Supporting this central factor through antecedent inputs and capacity would lead towards increase in the intended benefits. Since such efforts have to be attempted in real time and place, a general targets for wide ranging institutional contexts need to be avoided. For example, the central factor to improve incrementally the acquisition of basic educational tool at primary stage is the time on learning task. All our efforts in each of the specific instances of primary schooling need to focus on how to increase the time on task. The antecedent inputs are formation of learning groups, locally devised learning activities, and individualized work assignment. These in turn require different approach to augment capacity of the teacher in the specific contexts.

Obviously, such an approach requires arrangement for school based management, academic autonomy and capacity to exercise autonomy. The potential for such development is emerging and hence what I am proposing is not revolutionary in nature. We have constitutionally validated local governments. The conflict is between such recently emerging democratic institutions and historically existing bureaucratic educational administration with locus of control with reference to each school lying away and outside the communities served by each school. Conflict has to be faced and resolved through political mobilization and democratic processes involving civil society

organizations. Because of gradual nature of transition, the incremental changes may not be show case kind and spectacular but are likely to be enduring

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**Shashi Mendiratta, Independent Consultant-Education, Noida**

In my involvement with education in Delhi government schools, I have observed that in implementing any policy decisions everyone's eyes are on the person above- to appease, to flatter, to enhance image or to earn appreciation from - at all levels of implementation. Therefore, the teacher is looking at the education officer who is working with the deputy director of education who in turn is trying hard to meet the requirements of the director and so on. The child sitting in the classroom is far removed from the thought process and in spite of verbal commitments and correct jargon; words do not manifest themselves in the action of the day.

Change cannot be thrown down from the top. One good thing after another landing in the school premises and systems would not add up to quality. They will remain a collection of wonderful ideas to be showcased and talked about, but very little change would be actually visible in the lives of the children in terms of joy and eagerness in coming to school to learn (as opposed to escaping from domestic work, meeting friends and having a nice time together with nothing to do) and in increasing their chances of success in life.

If the eyes on the person above were to shift to the person below, then quality education should start with the teacher. If the teacher is able to keep to keep an eye on the students, then most of his/her activities would centre around needs of the child and the kind of demands that he/she makes of the system would dramatically change. The ripple effect would move upwards where the education officer is catering to the needs of the teacher and not vice-versa and so on to finally impact policies that are firmly rooted in reality. The empowerment of the teacher and subsequently of the Head of School is critical and here lies the speed breaker.

The degree to which the schools need to be decentralized and become centres of quality education fulfilling needs of the children of that neighbourhood requires the heads of school who have a vision, who are mature to stand up for their beliefs and argue their case without bending to authority. If we are talking of people in the job of nation building and not paying sufficient attention to who is occupying the post of the head of school then we are defeating the whole purpose. There ought to be a rigorous process of selection for principal - written test, interviews, aptitude and attitude assessment - to ensure that the person is able to lead a school.

In working with teachers in government schools, we found two positives as a basis to begin work - that they are a relatively young lot, and there is very low attrition rate - the teacher is there in the system even if they are transferred sometimes. With reference to motivation, we found that teachers' interest in their job increased with their understanding of the children in their class. As they were trained to conduct diagnostic tests on children to ascertain levels of competencies in their subjects, to tabulate the data and analyze it, the findings would fascinate them and gradually led them to design their lessons based on the understanding derived. It is different from research conducted by external agencies and findings conveyed. Add to this a monthly feature of coming together in subject groups and sharing stories, strategies, different findings and it is potent mix to put teachers on different plane of thought.

All of the above are my thoughts within the limits of my experiences

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**Binay Pattanayak, Technical Support Group-SSA, New Delhi**

I welcome a discussion on 'quality in education'. However, I am a bit surprised that the number of participants on this important issue is somewhat less. I have a different view on this point. While commenting on the issue of 'quality in education', on rare occasions we say 'it is happening' and on most occasions we say 'nothing is happening'. One needs to look at 'who is making such observations and in what context'. Those who are part of the process in educational development certainly feel that several things are happening for quality improvement in education. Under a huge programme like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan the number of innovative initiatives for quality improvement is enormous. Yet those who do not remain part of the 'process' start saying that 'it is a gone case' or, 'nothing is happening'. This is really an interesting situation. Being part of the process I feel many good things are happening. At the same time, one also is forced to accept that there are certain issues and problems as the challenge itself is huge. Issues and problems are bound to be associated with any process. Let us honour them and face them.

I do not agree with some of Subir's points when he interprets it as an unsolved puzzle. Like in any other system in the human society, here also an equal proportion of committed people are striving hard for quality improvement. One needs to respect such hard efforts when the challenges are quite stiff. Things will certainly demand more time and investments for achieving desired quality. The way curriculum framework (e.g., National Curriculum Framework NCF 2005), textbooks, innovative teaching learning materials, quality improvement programmes (Quality Improvement Programme in AP, Children's Language Improvement Programme (CLIP) followed by Children's Learning Acceleration Programme (CLAP) in AP, Learners' Achievement Tracking System (LATS) in Orissa, Integrated Learning Improvement Programme (ILIP) in West Bengal, *Bidya Jyoti* and Learning Assurance Programme (LAP) in Assam, Trimester System, Karnataka State Quality Assurance Organisation (KSQAO) in Karnataka, Activity Based Learning (ABL) programme in 10 schools of each block of the state other than the Municipality Corporation schools in Chennai, 3 Rs Guarantee Programme of 60 days for learning enhancement of 8 lakh children, followed by Educational Quality Improvement Programme (EQIP) in Maharashtra, Gujarat Achievement Profile (GAP); 4 studies in collaboration with universities; identification of learning needs; teacher training and remedial support for learning enhancement in Gujarat, Quality Monitoring Tools under SSA and many more) have evolved over the years is phenomenal. Even the rate at which BRCs and CRC's has been established, teachers have been recruited and trained is satisfying.

This was no way a small task. One needs to appreciate efforts of the number of people across the country, who have made it possible. Other than this, the high level of exposure such programmes have given to all in the field is very much useful in the long run. Teachers, teacher educators and managers have been exposed to wide range of resource persons, resource centres and resource materials, which was never possible in the history of education in the country. This has contributed significantly to the system's learning on along term basis. Nobody can deny this. There was a time when less people were better exposed to such resources. Now a large number of personnel are exposed to wide range of resources and are empowered. Let us count this as a big achievement. Now the number and level of participation of people in different educational activities are much better than better. The large range of materials developed under the programme is a reflection of such empowerment. Let us respect that.

Now the whole focus is on quality improvement in each classroom. We have a good number of examples before us not only from inside the country, but also from outside through resource persons, literature and internet. The quantity and quality of experimentation in our country are good as they involve huge number of people from different parts of the country. The types of questions and issues discussed in different meetings, seminars etc. is a reflection of the 'thinking' going on in the system. Let us count that.

At the same time, I agree that it needs to improve further. Let us strive for that consistently and collectively. However, this can be done in a good way if we try to understand the genesis of the efforts. Let us critique the ongoing moves for quality improvement along with a sense of appreciation for hard efforts, thoughts and actions of large number of people. After working with NGOs, Movements and Govt. system for several years, I feel experienced to say that like in any other system here also there are equal proportion of thinkers and doers in the ongoing programmes. In a large-scale programme with millions of minds, hands and legs operating together the social constructivism is bound to be somewhat slow. At the same time, it has its strength and long term promises. When more and more people participate in a programme with their minds, hands and legs it has a strong potential. Let us honour their collective efforts.

At present, it is being attempted to look more intimately at the learning process of children. The NCF 2005 has certainly articulated possible strategies for effective classroom processes. I do not feel constructivist approach to learning (Subir interprets it as an advanced process!) is a new concept before us. Many people in the past and present both in our country and outside have experimented with learning processes this way and have found it to be a natural and appealing way of human learning. Can we ever say that approach of Rabindranath, Sri Aurobindo, Giju bhai, etc. in our country or, the same of Sukhomlinsky, Dewey, Sylvia Ashton Warner, Piaget, Dorothy Law Nolte, Paulo Friere, Maria were not constructivist in nature? Anybody sensitive towards children's learning (and development) is expected to find constructivist approach a natural way of learning. There are many teachers in our country who follow this approach while working with children in spite of limitations of curriculum documents in history. They would find the NCF 2005 as something bearing hope as it gives them ample space to apply their thoughts and experiences into classroom processes. Other teachers and teacher educators can gain from their process for own empowerment and experiments. Let us appreciate the historical value of such a child friendly, teacher friendly, learning friendly pathfinder in the form of the NCF 2005. Personally I feel, NCF 2005 certainly provides solutions to teachers' education. One needs to go through it carefully and understand the spirit. It certainly expects the teachers to understand own role and functions while facilitating children's learning processes in different subject areas. Presently many things are happening in India for enhancing the quality consciousness. Dr. Shabnam Sinha, who has been part of the process for a long time, has highlighted some of the initiatives.

Other than those there are several things happening at the NCERT (Reading cell, International conferences on Learners' evaluation, rich websites on constructivism and related aspects, new textbooks, regular discussions on educational issues, Operationalisation of Quality Monitoring Tools, regular surveys on learning achievement, etc.), NIEPA (DISE, regular workshops on educational management and research), MHRD (constitution of National Resource Group, submissions on quality, regular studies, discussions on learning enhancement and quality of education with state authorities, Advancement of Educational Performance through Teacher Support, etc.), Technical Support Group- TSG (Resource Enhancement Programme, National Quarterly Quality Review Meetings, Documentation and sharing of good practices, Planning Assistance Teams for contextual planning, Quality related planning and appraisal, Technical support to States for quality enhancement, research on emerging quality issues, seminars on educational issues, etc.) and at the state level where the number of innovations is very high. I am attaching a small write up on "Quality related interventions under SSA" for reference.

There are also many other bodies striving for quality improvement including universities, NGOs, Corporates, and many eminent personalities. The type of debates and discussions that are taking place during the reviews, in particular the Joint Review Missions (in each 6 months, more specifically the desk reviews) reflect that in spite of big achievement still the situation is neither rosy nor gloomy. It needs larger commitment and stronger moves. However, the overall direction towards is somewhat steady. It may not be fully achieved by the deadline. However, the

progress is steady and would not require many more years to achieve the target. We are now discussing at a stage when the content, nature, process and impact of teacher support mechanism is reviewed through specially designed programmes & research studies. Classrooms are observed intimately through time on task studies, issue based programmes are being implemented for learning enhancement, studies are undertaken by NCERT and several other agencies including Pratham on learning achievement for different classes and quality monitoring tools designed by NCERT and other academic bodies are operationalised across the country.

I feel at this stage it is important for any body interested in the quality of education in the country to take part in the process as a friend who believes that there are many more workers like us in the system who need to be supported and there are still several capable personnel who need to be associated with such a nationwide programme. Our concern for 'our schools and our children' and our truly democratic attitude and practices matter more than our individual identity. If we can join hands for the cause then our feelings can also be strengthened and together we can deliver better than before. One needs to accept that there are many committed and capable players in the field. Their initiatives can be further strengthened through friendly collaborations, not through mere advices and monitoring attitudes. It needs to be a socially constructive process.

Finally, I would like to highlight an initiative named Resource Enhancement Programme (REP) that TSG had facilitated by inviting a good number of experienced resource persons from universities, educational resource centres, state practitioners and eminent individuals. REP tried to work upon basic issues in education for enhancing the understanding and preparation of key players in the quality circle in the states. Series of such workshops were organized where the participants debated and experimented strongly on issues related to philosophy of education, aims of education, learning theories, how children learn different concepts in language, math, science, role of teacher, concept of evaluation, etc. After five such fortnight long workshops similar exercises were carried out in selected states. In the long run, such resource persons with more friends collectively worked through national focus groups across the country to come up with a valuable document like NCF 2005. We need to imbibe the spirit of REP like activities further to enhance the interest, learning ability and learning process of the system as a whole. We need more and more of such democratic dialogues, experiments and collaborations across the nation for systemic transformation and for further improvement in quality.

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**Yuman Hussain, Azad India Foundation, Kishanganj**

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and other government programmes have failed to achieve its goal at least in the rural districts of Bihar. I can give examples from the Kishanganj district where the quality of the teachers appointed is pathetic. There is no monitoring and evaluation system to ensure that the people who are appointed as teachers can at least read and write. Majority of the teachers who undergo so-called training and refresher training sponsored by the Government do not bother to attend classes.

The educational quality will never improve if there is only cosmetic treatment to the issue.

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**Mahi Pal, Haryana Institute of Rural Development, Nilokheri**

Most often parents feel that since they are not incurring or sharing any direct costs in education, the quality is low. The solution to the problem lies in giving the ownership of local education in the hands of the people and also parents should share the cost of education.

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## **Priyanka Dale, PRIA, New Delhi**

It is encouraging to see that discussion on quality issues in education has come up and we are talking beyond enrolment numbers. Mr. Binay Pattanayak's response was quite informative about achievements of SSA in improving quality measures and pleasant to learn that SSA is aware of its weakness and is open for further improvements.

Article 42 of the Expanded Commentary on the Dakar Framework of Action elaborates quality education as one that satisfies basic learning needs, enriches the lives of learners and their overall experience of living. And the measures to attain the required quality were suggested as under:

1. Healthy, well-nourished and motivated students
2. Adequate facilities and learning materials
3. A relevant curriculum
4. Environment that encourages learning
5. Clear definition of learning outcomes
6. Accurate assessment of learning outcomes
7. Participatory governance and management
8. Engaging local communities

Reviewing these measures, I feel presently many initiatives have been taken on point 1- 6. However, what we lack is to attain is point 7 and 8 and which in turn affects 1-6.

Participatory governance and engagement of communities under SSA are the most important components, which lacks focus. It is not that everything is gloomy but it is equally true that good practices are in few small pockets. The functioning of village education committees (VECs/SDMC) and Parents teachers associations (PTA) is at times weak/non effective. Members of these committees are hardly aware of their membership status. Teachers rather than local communities/panchayat representatives mostly operate VECs and these committees are created as parallel bodies. (Panchayats have sub-committee for education, which is approved by Gram Sabha.) SSA's implementation guidelines suggest few more committees to manage education system at local level. They are block level education committee (BLEC), cluster level education committee (CLEC), District level education committee (DLEC). SSA has specified the regulations for conducting regular meetings of these committees at Village /Block/District level. However, in practice regularity in meetings is hardly maintained. Meetings are held only when any civil works are to be decided or grants to be disbursed. Documentation of the proceedings of the meetings is another issue, which acts as constraint for follow up of the meetings. Sharing the proceedings with community or putting the minutes for public display in schools is a rare practice.

Another issue, which acts as constraint for community involvement in the local educational system is the planning process adopted in SSA. Every year SSA district offices prepare a district education plan for which a proper process of bottom up planning has to be followed. SSA suggests a habitation plan, which has to be prepared by teachers and members of PTA/community. The habitation level plans should be drawn based on the micro planning and school mapping exercise. In addition, this plan is incorporated in district perspective plan. Teachers at school levels often prepare habitation plans without any participation from the PTA/MTA. Micro-planning exercises if at all done are mostly done by SSA block resource centre personnel. Similarly, in the district level plans neither the Zilla Panchayat nor Block panchayat representatives are being involved. Cluster level committees and block level committees of SSA are mostly unaware of this exercise.

Condition is worse when the practical implementation of the gender plan of SSA is seen (covering schemes like National programme of education of girls at elementary level –NPEGEL and

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalaya scheme-KGBVS), especially in states like Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand). Model cluster schools and residential schools under the schemes are being operated for providing holistic education to girl child. However, the condition of some of the residential schools is worse. Incentives are not regular or not given at all. No proper security system at night in the schools. No facility for sweepers, girls have to clean the whole school premise, their rooms and toilets on their own. Adding to this they are not being able to read a single paragraph fluently in Hindi.

We require a more broad and open approach to implement what we envisage which cannot be done if we keep on ignoring grassroots realities. Systems need to be redesigned so that local level accountability and transparency is built upon in the educational system.

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### **Rajesh Kumar, Swayam Krishi Sangam, Hyderabad**

To improve the quality of Government educational institutions, the involvement and co-operation from the community is very important in rural areas. The lack of alternatives to the government schools is one of the main causes for its low quality. As there is no threat to the survival of schools and their jobs, government teachers are not maintaining the quality of education. Only the poor and neglected communities are using the government educational services and they are not able to raise their voice against the schools. Those who are able to afford private schools use them. All influential people including Government teachers and other officials are already avoiding government educational and health services.

To improve the quality of services, alternative schools need to be provided to create competition. Funds need to be directly given to the parents in form of VOUCHER, so that they can select where to send their children and which service they want to use.

We are working towards this by establishing low cost schools in rural areas and hence creating competition to improve the quality of the education services.

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***Many thanks to all who contributed to this query!***

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