

# LearnIng CURVe

Issue XVI, March 2011



Azim Premji  
Foundation

A Newsletter from  
Azim Premji Foundation

For Private Circulation only



Special Issue

In this issue

## SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

- ★ The Construct And Scope Of Educational Leadership
- ★ School Leader – Academician Or Administrator?
- ★ School Leadership In India: Creating A Sense Of Direction
- ★ Four Challenges In School Leadership
- ★ Personal Reflections and more.....

**Editorial Team**

Hriday Kant Dewan, Jayashree Misra, Neeraja Raghavan,  
Nidhi Tiwari, S Giridhar, Swati Chanda

**Design**

Adroit Human Creative Services Pvt. Ltd.,  
Email : [contact@adroithuman.com](mailto:contact@adroithuman.com)

**Printed by**

Pragathi Prints  
Bangalore - 560 103

**Please Note:** All views and opinions expressed in this issue are that of the authors and Azim Premji Foundation bears no responsibility for the same.

The theme for this, the XVI issue of Learning Curve is "School Leadership". When we first began to conceptualize the theme for this issue, we thought we would explore the entire subject of education leadership and management. But it took us less than two rounds of discussions to realize that we would do justice to this theme only if we took a single aspect of this important discipline and discussed that in depth. And that is how this issue is devoted to a discussion on various aspects of school leadership.

"School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning." Nobody would argue with this. So it seems strange and depressing that for our million plus schools we do not have a proper system of selection, training, mentorship and continuous development of school leaders. Whenever there is discussion on "what are the most pressing issues that need to be addressed to improve India's education", school leadership figures prominently. If there is dire need for significantly ramping up the academic support system, then there is an equally desperate need to strengthen the quality of leadership of our schools and education administration. Education policy makers and administrators need to take some concerted action in this regard.

We reached out to a number of experts on the subject. Once again we are beholden to these friends who have contributed articles with a lot of enthusiasm. Talking of the support we have received, I must make special mention of Hardy (Dr. Hriday Kant Dewan). Every issue has received much of his time and benefited immensely from his suggestions. It was no different this time. He offered to write for us, argued about the topics and also helped us connect with some of the authors. In fact the stormy meeting where we moved the theme of this issue from "education system leadership" to

"school leadership" was memorable for Hardy's spirited arguments!

As I sign off, I cannot help but reminisce about the principal of my school

in the late sixties. Our school was in army barracks with just rudimentary amenities. But running through the entire school was a buzzing energy that sprang from the principal. So suddenly, when the Australian cricket team played a match in our city, our principal had organized season tickets for all middle and high school children at throwaway prices. When presidential elections took place he had a "score board" outside his office that gave us a blow by blow update of V V Giri building an unassailable lead over Sanjiva Reddy. When Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon, he got a scientist from one of the institutes to give an absolutely amazing talk to spellbound children. The time table would often go for a toss once preparations for the annual day celebrations began. He was hell bent that every child should have at least a minute on the stage. And he was a gambler! When he heard me mimicking some actors, he simply plucked me and sent me for a mono acting competition where all I had to do was to reproduce the voices and mannerisms of heroes and villains of the film industry. Basically, I think he had a ball being school principal!

We have had a lot of satisfaction putting together this issue and bringing to you a rich spread of essays. Do let us know if we have met your expectations. Your feedback will help us to continuously improve subsequent editions.



**S. Giridhar**

Head – University Resource Center

# CONTENTS

Issue XVI : March 2011  
School Leadership

## Section A: The Broad Picture



- The Construct And Scope Of Educational Leadership 7  
*-Sunil Batra*



- School Leadership In Context 13  
*-Hriday Kant Dewan & Preeti Misra*



- School Leader – Academician Or Administrator? 20  
*-Gurumurthy Kasinathan*



- Schools And Leadership – A Critical Look 24  
*-Venu N*



- The Headmaster And The School Education System 27  
*-Rashmi Sharma*



- Where Are You In The Journey And How Do You Take The Next Leap? 30  
*-Mona Mourshed, Ramesh Mangaleswaran & Ramya Venkataraman*



- Management And Public Systems - Education: A Case Study 34  
*-Dileep Ranjekar*

## Section B: Some Perspectives



- Reflections On School Leadership 37  
*-Vimala Ramachandran*



- School Administration: For Humanness And Vitality 40  
*-G Gautama*



- Leading For Learning: A Case For Instructional Leadership In Schools 45  
*-Anustup Nayak*



- Building Head Teachers Into Intrinsically Motivated "Mini Cluster Resouce Centers" 48  
*-Aditya Natraj*



- Four Challenges In School Leadership: Small, Private, Innovative Schools 51  
*-Priya Iyer*



- Head Teachers As School Leaders In The Indian Education System 55  
*-Jagannath Rao*



- Autonomy And Accountability Of The School Head: How Much Is Too Much? 59  
*-Niveditha Bedadur*



- Lead Kindly Light... Leadership Issues In Schools 63  
*-Amukta Mahapatra*



- Factors That Differentiate Successful Schools - Findings From Learning Guarantee Program 66  
*-D D Karopady and S Giridhar*





Institutional Culture In Education – Some Learnings From The Education Leadership Development Program, Karnataka  
-Suparna Diwakar 71



From Nobody To Somebody - Journey With The Parents' Body Of A Village Primary School  
-Umashankar Periodi 74



Community Participation And School Leadership: Illustrations From Namma Shale Initiative In Rural Karnataka  
-Pradeep Ramavath & Ravindrprakash 77



## Section C: Personal Reflections



My Notion Of A Good School Head  
-Urmila Chowdhury 81



"My School - My Dream - My Ideal Image Of A School Leader"  
-Ayesha Das 83



The Model Principal  
-Jayanthi Joseph 86



The Principal As A School Leader: Through The Eyes Of A Student  
-Rajni Dwivedi 88



The Chair So High  
-Neeraja Raghavan 90



A Tribute To My Headmistress  
-Kalyani Rajaraman 92

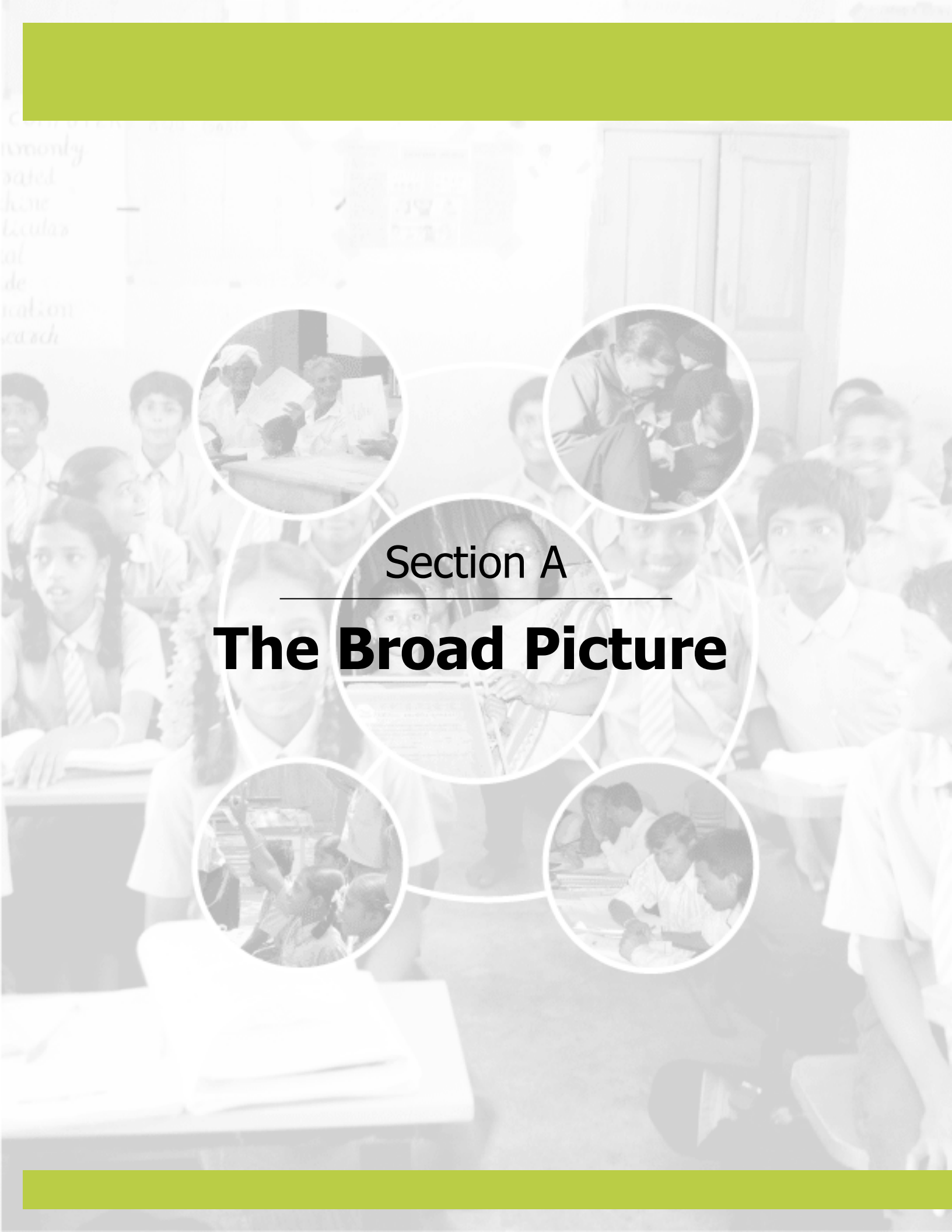


Reflections – From Doing To Managing  
-Renu Srinivasan 93

## Section D: Resource Kit

Resource Kit

98



Section A

---

# The Broad Picture

"School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning. "

**A**cross a few hundred schools in India, there are teachers who provide relevant challenges to children, inspire them to ask questions, and dialogue about issues that impact their growing up years. Similarly, there are experienced educators who guide novice teachers to plan for multiple levels in the classroom and optimum utilization of school resources.

In several schools, there are also teachers who meet in small groups every week to evolve clarity about issues related to children's progress and the curriculum with department heads and the school head.

The examples quoted above do not exist in a vacuum. All teachers work in the contexts of their environment – the people, the resources made available for them, the nature of support provided to them, the vision of the organization (or the lack of it), the content of training and support made available at the school level, economic compensation for their work, and opportunities to read, reflect and share.

Behind every group of thinking and sensitive teachers are a few or more people who believe in the impact that teachers can make in a classroom and find ways to enable teachers to connect with children, with pedagogical processes and with the moral purpose of learning.



Beyond merely motivating teachers, they nurture ideas, identify issues, resolve tensions and enable systems, practices, beliefs, preparation and capacity building. They provide an intuitive and experientially learnt sense of 'educational leadership'. 'Educational leadership' as a construct and as an applied discipline of learning refers to developing and honing - through reflection, theoretical frameworks, enquiry, dialogue, planning and professional exchange - experiences related to leading educational institutions, people, systems, support institutions, and their management within and across institutions.

Unfortunately, for the bulk of India's school teachers, in government and private schools, rural and urban areas, the range of influences inside and outside schools can hardly be termed professional, nurturing or supportive. Of the more than ten and a half lakh schools in India, 60% of the primary schools are 2 or 3 teacher schools and therefore neither have an official position of a school head nor are they oriented to develop the notion of leadership for quality education. The government provides a position of a school head where there are 5 or more teachers. Where the position of the school head is available, the senior-most teacher, by date of appointment, is expected to fill the position with no training for leadership or management. Often, the school head position is not filled because of bureaucratic and political delays.

In private schools, the position of the head is usually filled keeping in mind the ability of the incumbent to be strong in 'public relations' which in effect is determined by the need to establish marketability of a school in economic and social terms. Parameters such as pedagogical interests, humility in leadership, and the ability to facilitate a differentiated curriculum is either not sought or valued. Consequently, in most schools, basic notions about educational leadership, support for teacher development, curriculum facilitation, and organizational management are non-existent.

At the level of the block or district, educational leadership is traditionally believed to be administrative in nature where

*In private schools, the position of the head is usually filled keeping in mind the ability of the incumbent to be strong in 'public relations' which in effect is determined by the need to establish marketability of a school in economic and social terms. Parameters such as pedagogical interests, humility in leadership, and the ability to facilitate a differentiated curriculum is either not sought or valued.*

data entry, monitoring of schedules, report writing and testing assume greater importance than specialised aspects of pedagogical guidance, mentoring, management and knowledge development of teachers and school leaders. Failures in performance in senior school are often attributed to 'poor teaching' in the lower grades. There are no linkages established between the developmental needs of children and the design and management of the school curriculum. School teachers, heads and support organisations (CRCs, BEOs, DIETs) are usually unaware of inter and intra-organisational roles and are rarely able to visualise planning, preparation and change facilitation holistically. The school head is expected to learn on the job with little or no institutionalized support. Consequently, wide gaps exist in the interpretation of curricular needs, teacher preparation and team development throughout the school years.

In other words, lack of leadership training in combination with an amorphously defined position of the school head implies that there are no structured and reliable ways of developing accountability systems and practices (other than the narrowly defined board exam results). Absence of opportunities of learning about professional practices in educational leadership has also resulted in poorly defined relationships between school heads, education administrators, managers and policy makers. Other than the work of organizations such as NUEPA and a few SIEMATS, which also has been largely administrative, institutional

engagement for education leadership has been limited and sparse.

Studies reveal that what school heads do and how they lead others impacts the learning environment of schools and learning outcomes of students. The effect of leaders is largely indirect in improving school results and is considered the second most important influence in changing the school environment and the lives of young learners. Studies have also established that 'leaders achieve results through others' and that is the essence of leadership (Early and Weindling 2004, Leithwood 2004).

In the absence of defined notions of educational leadership, the study and impact of leadership on the quality of education provided in schools has received little or no attention in India. Therefore, organised opportunities need to be created to construct knowledge about institutional development in the context of the relationships that evolve between teachers, parents, students, the school head, the community and government functionaries. Leadership cannot continue to be dependent on charismatic heroes or dynamic visionaries. As a society we must learn to facilitate the development of communities of proactive leaders in education.

What prevents us from enabling school heads and administrators to learn about professional ways to support teachers in their roles as facilitators? While the obvious answers would be willingness to learn and provision of

Educational leadership as a method of enquiry, research, training and learning in programs of higher education and continuing professional development is by and large unrecognized in India. In parts of Europe, UK, USA, Australia, China and Singapore, a fair amount has been written about administrative and educational leadership. In the last few decades, theories of management and corporate training practices have immensely influenced the western discourse in administrative and educational leadership. With increasing influence of the corporate sector and privatization, notions of efficiency, measurable outcomes, target achievement and management have altered conventional ways of assessing achievement levels of learners, teachers and institutions. Owing to widespread criticism of the outcome and efficiency driven perspective, there has also been a conscious shift in the western world to bring into centre-stage pedagogical and humane aspects of education. Consequently, leadership is believed to encompass much more than administration and management. Leaders in educational institutions are expected to take on challenges to strengthen teaching-learning practices and provide sustained support for teacher development. They are expected to learn about enabling professional practices that support curriculum development, team leadership, accountability and supervision. The most commonly articulated expectation is to facilitate change and effectively manage the shifts that emerge with change facilitation. Terms such as 'transformational leadership', 'shared leadership', 'pedagogical leadership' and 'distributed leadership' are commonly referred to in leadership training, institutional development and change facilitation (Early and Weindling 2004, Fullan 1995, Harris 2002).

organized opportunities, closer examination reveals that impediments to change tend to be embedded in our cultural and institutional practices. The dominant set of constraints that prevent practicing and prospective educational leaders from exercising their roles with focus and sensitivity may be attributed to:

- a) The culture of the inspector raj
- b) Absence of institutional vision and support
- c) The teaching for testing practice

### The Culture Of The Inspector Raj

*The effect of leaders is largely indirect in improving school results and is considered the second most important influence in changing the school environment and the lives of young learners. Studies have also established that 'leaders achieve results through others' and that is the essence of leadership (Early and Weindling 2004, Leithwood 2004).*

Administrative structures in education operate in a vertical, complex hierarchy. For most states, the hierarchy under the Directorate of Education includes the District Education Officer, Deputy District Education Officers, Block Education Officers or Junior Deputy Inspectors. To decentralize control, under the DPEP and SSA, parallel positions were created for Block Level Resource Persons and Cluster Level Resource Persons. In some states and districts, the positions of the BEO and BRPs have been merged in terms of roles and responsibilities with continuing confusion about old and new profiles.

Primary schools are mostly under the supervision of junior officers who are usually regarded as 'generalists', while secondary schools are supervised by senior officers in the hierarchy who are referred to as 'subject-specialists'. Owing to a lack of coordination between officers responsible for primary and secondary schools there are no collective

attempts to improve school services in a community. Primary education is the most neglected because very few primary schools have designated positions of heads and the 'inspector or BEO/BRP' is not necessarily expected to be knowledgeable about supervising learning in the elementary years. With poor infrastructure and budget support, and high number of schools to supervise, the BEO is perhaps the most overloaded actor in the education system. In addition, the relationship between the school and the inspecting authority continues to be determined by historical baggage that largely consists of checking attendance and facilitating board examinations with high levels of secrecy. Today, where demands on schools are manifold and expectations far more complex, the inspecting authority has not transitioned to a supporting, supervisory role. The result is either minimal or fragmented supervision of schools.

Educational leadership as a practice can help educators and policy makers devise new structures of supervision and support through rationalization of roles, thoughtful staffing arrangements, adequate financial allocations, training for effective communication, and specific skills development for implementation of ideas.

### The Absence Of Institutional Vision

With weak or non-existent supervision and the absence of institutional vision at the block, cluster and school level, education is one of the most neglected sectors of our country. Other than the objectives provided by state or central government driven programs (Operation Blackboard, MLL, DPEP and SSA), schools rarely visualize or articulate their own vision. Not having a vision, a goal or an aim to work for with a moral purpose of development for a people or a community is tantamount to working in a void. Consider, for instance, the lack of imagination and creativity in most school programs and events. School functions are almost always imitations of past celebrations and a standard copy of what is acceptable by the block and district level officers. Little wonder that most school heads and BEOs treat their roles as secure government jobs where minimal effort becomes the fait accompli. Despondency and cynicism takes over bright minds and the committed. Support and guidance is made available for personalized administrative ends (transfers, sanctioning leaves, promotions) but not educational and cultural goals. Imagination and initiative, the hallmark of education and learning are scuttled.

Vision development and clarity about what we teach, why we teach, when we teach is particularly important for the diversity of cultures and schools in our country (Kumar 1992). The behaviorist approach to teaching has been the most dominant influence in school education in India. On the other hand, significant influences have emerged because of NCF 2005 and the work of several NGOs and a few university departments. At the same time, conflicts continue to arise in the minds of many teachers while dealing with the ubiquitous tensions between traditional and ever changing social values and relationships. The average teacher in government and private schools is ill equipped to deal with social tensions, policy demands and pressures to produce politically acceptable results with inflated marks and percentages (Bottery 2006).

The crux of enabling change in education is about evolving a vision and about developing capacities to realize the vision. Kai-ming Cheng reminds us that "vision-building is not only a matter of working on the individual school leaders, it is also necessary to work against a larger culture that does not favour vision development within individual schools" (1995). Visions evolve with time, experience, reflection and partnership. Effectively, "all practitioners and school leaders need a good deal of reflective experience before they can form a plausible vision" (Fullan 1995).

Educational leadership offers opportunities to train people to develop a vision for their departments, their roles and ways of functioning. It helps re-establish the very purpose for which the education sector exists – children. International practices in educational leadership are increasingly training to inspire, identify and develop cadres of leaders to provide pedagogical and visionary leadership to their institutions. Isn't it time that we develop home-grown contexts and understanding of how educational leaders can impact relevant educational change?

### **The Teaching For Testing Practice**

Teaching for testing has been the practice and culture for the bulk of government and private schools in India. The behaviorist paradigm of learning found its complimentary position with entrenched Indian hierarchies driven by patriarchy and caste. The result is a highly stratified educational hierarchy. As long as teachers are expected to teach to fulfill the demands of the examination system, the relationship between the teacher and the supervisory head

will continue to be inspectorial in nature. What is expected of the head (by the inspector/BEO) is demanded of the teacher.

Breaking the shackles of test-driven teaching implies being able to visualize change. To be able to visualize change, psychological, structural and functional spaces for change must be created. The ability to create such spaces emerges with dialogue, skills development and structural shifts. Educational leaders need to be equipped to initiate and facilitate meaningful dialogues. They need to be empowered to enable shifts in the interpretation and implementation of relevant curricular practices. They need to be trusted to be able to facilitate shifts that are meant for the good of the children and their teachers. For instance, where a school head feels that they would like to foster a reading environment, they should be able to source books that inspire both teachers and children. Visits to libraries and bookstores in towns and cities with colleagues a few times in a year would become essential prerequisites. Similarly, for teachers to recognize the value of regular fitness and sports in a school curriculum, they should be able to participate in outdoor programs that help build them their own physical and mental strengths.

As new curricular designs emerge across the school years, indicators and processes to assess the progress of learners also evolve. Dealing with multiple levels of learning would inevitably mean learning to develop multiple ways of transacting a curriculum. What works for some children may

“

*Little wonder that most school heads and BEOs treat their roles as secure government jobs where minimal effort becomes the fait accompli. Despondency and cynicism takes over bright minds and the committed. What prevents us from enabling school heads and administrators to learn about professional ways to support teachers in their roles as facilitators?*

”

not work for others. Strategies used in special education may provide new insights to prevent learning difficulties in mainstream classrooms. The work of the educational leader is to help teachers identify and create multiple ways of facilitating relevance and meaningful for all.

In addition to the responsibility of designing new tools and processes arises the responsibility of communicating changes to parents and the community. The management and leadership of such experiences can prove to be a tall order. Trained educational leaders can foster innovations and enduring relationships to facilitate change in meaningful stages.

### Conclusion

Educational leadership as an applied discipline of learning offers tremendous opportunities for educators, academics and policy makers to establish overt and covert connections between the different components (or sub-systems) that constitute the system of education. By studying the interconnectedness between sub-systems, it provides frameworks that are more inclusive and accepting of multiple needs of the various actors in the education system.

The greatest challenge for an educational leader is to

develop viable components of culturally relevant standards of learning. In keeping with changing expectations of quality and performance, educational leaders will increasingly need to examine and debate the merits and demerits of standardization practices versus the possibility of developing locally relevant 'layered standards' (Sergiovanni 2001). Through research, professional exchange and policy analyses, educational leaders can prepare for changing curricular and evaluation practices, and social inclusion policies.

Altering traditional mindsets in school practice is not easy. Sustaining change is even more challenging. Visualizing change in stages will help facilitators and participants prepare for the directions in which change will evolve (Webb 2005). In addition to conviction building, desirable models of education require the development of systemic inputs inside a school and in the structures of the education system that exist to support schools.

Educational leadership is the most critical missing link in the journey for change in education and in society. Since culture and education are not static, learning about what works and how different components can be enabled to work more effectively is the prerequisite for leading change.

### Footnotes

1. Leithwood K., et al. "Seven Strong Claims About School Leadership", [www.ncsl.org.uk](http://www.ncsl.org.uk), 2009

### References

1. Batra, S. (2003) 'From School inspection to School Support', in : Sood, N. (ed) Management of School Education in India, NIEPA.
2. Bottery, M (2006) 'Educational leaders in a globalizing world: a new set of priorities?' in School Leadership and Management, Vol. 26, No. 1, February, 2006.
3. Cheng, Kai-ming (1995) 'Vision building among school leaders' in Wong, K. C. and Cheng, K. M. (eds) Educational Leadership and Change: An International Perspective, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press.
4. Early, P. and Weindling, D.(2004) "A changing discourse: from management to leadership" in: Understanding school leadership, Paul Chapman Publications.
5. Fullan, Michael G.(1995) 'The evolution of change and the new work of the educational leader', in: Wong, K. C. and Cheng, K. M. (eds) Educational Leadership and Change: An International Perspective, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press.
6. Harris, Alma (2002) School Improvement: What's in it for schools?, Routledge Falmer, London.
7. Kumar, Krishna (1992) What is worth teaching?, Orient Longman, New Delhi.
8. Leithwood, K. et al (2004) 'Strategic leadership for large scale reform: the case of England's National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy' in School

Leadership and Management, Vol. 24, No. 1, February 2004.

9. Leithwood K., et al. (2009) "Seven strong claims about school leadership", [www.ncsl.org.uk](http://www.ncsl.org.uk)
10. Senge, P. M. (1990). The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization. New York: Doubleday.
11. Sergiovanni, Thomas R.(2001) Leadership: What's in it for schools?, Routledge, London.
12. Webb, Rosemary (2005) 'Leading teaching and learning in the primary school' in Educational Management Administration and Leadership, Sage Publications, Vol 33 (1), 69-91, 2005
13. Wong, Kam-cheung (1995) 'Culture and leadership', in: Wong, K. C. and Cheng, K. M. (eds) Educational Leadership and Change: An International Perspective, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press.

---

**Sunil Batra, M.Ed.** has been working closely with children, teachers, school leaders and parents to facilitate progressive practices in education for more than 20 years. He specializes in nurturing progressive schools from Nursery to Class XII and is involved in the design and transaction of higher education programs in Educational Leadership and Management. Sunil is the Founder Director Education of Shikshantar, an innovative school located in Gurgaon. With international experiences in education, he has been associated with several schools of the NCR, Delhi and is a resource person with universities in Delhi and Mumbai, NGOs and educational initiatives of the Government of India. Sunil may be contacted at [sunilbatra07@gmail.com](mailto:sunilbatra07@gmail.com).



**What Is A Good School?**

In order to understand school leadership it is appropriate to first consider what a school does and what could be the key elements that make it function well. From our collective experience of schools we all realize it is not easy to identify these elements. So far, there is no obvious set of aspects which can ensure the quality of a school. In recent times there have been attempts to identify and in some way describe them but these have not been able to go beyond basic infrastructure and the need for technically qualified persons as teachers. In some cases, they are stretched to include teaching-learning materials which are more than textbooks and notebooks and infrastructure that includes basic facilities for all children to ensure their convenient presence. The experience of the intensive studies on schools as well as anecdotes and conversations with people who are in close touch with schools suggests that while these factors may have some effect on the way the school functions they are certainly not the most significant requirements. Schools that are next door to each other and appear to be broadly similar in terms of infrastructure, environment, ambience, having equally well-certified and qualified teachers and other characteristics can show very different attitudes towards

*For a comprehensive educational experience for the child the school has to function as a team. There has to be sharing of ideas and information about children among the teachers and a common perspective of how to move forward has to be developed. Teachers need to not only conceptualize the possibilities of making classrooms interesting but also share and smoothen differences amongst each other. All of this needs to be anchored in a process or in a person. In most cases, the school leader has to play this anchoring role.*



**Hriday Kant  
Dewan**



**Preeti Misra**

children. In turn, the way children relate to these schools is also very different and so are the outcomes.

Our definition of these outcomes depends on our opinion about the role of the school and the children coming out of it - the product of the school in a sense - should be like. For example, it could be an expectation that the children coming out of the school grow into adults who can calculate rapidly and without errors. This would imply that the school makes an attempt to ensure that children calculate quickly even if it is at the cost of building conceptual clarity.

The meaning of education in the current context has widened. The consensually articulated view that dominates discourse is that the school has to provide a complete education to children which encompasses more than just learning to read and write and solve known problems. Children need to be able to relate to other children, be sensitive to the pain of others and also respect others. They need to be able to acquire new ideas and create their own descriptions. We know that human beings do not acquire knowledge piecemeal. Many ideas are simultaneously put together to obtain a clearer picture of the whole. For example, the concept of force grows along with and gets clarified as being distinct from energy, power, work and momentum. Or, as the idea of a rational number grows, it helps build a better understanding of natural numbers, negative numbers and fractional numbers as well. As concepts develop, linkages with other subjects also grow stronger. These are some of the important aspects of learning that cannot be ignored.

For a comprehensive educational experience for the child it is clear that the school has to function as a team. There has to be sharing of ideas and information about children among the teachers and a common perspective of how to move forward. Not only must each teacher know what the other teachers are doing - the why and how - but there

must also be a common framework which can help each individual anticipate what is the expected response to specific situations. For such a team to function there is a need for a process where this cohesion can be developed, consolidated and nurtured. Angularities and differences of views can either be buried or shared and discussed. They should not be allowed to distort day-to-day functioning given the fact that each teacher has to engage with and have a dialogue with a group of children over a large part of the day. These engagements can be tiring and it is not always easy to make them interesting. Teachers have to not only conceptualize the possibilities of making classrooms interesting but also organize activities and patiently steer children through them. It becomes critical to have the sharing and smoothening of difference anchored in a process or in a person. In most cases, the school leader has to play this anchoring role.

### The School Leader

It is important to clarify the role of the school leader. In the context of large schools where there are many teachers and many faculties, the role of the leader generally becomes that of an administrative head or a manager. It is considered advisable that the school head functions like the head of a bureaucratic structure so that the systems are understandable to everyone. In such a structure, there cannot be space for dialogue and discussions at all levels about everything as the school system has to work with precision. Even in smaller institutions there is a demand for 'consistency' and 'transparency' which reduces the flexibility and choice for the school leader.

Is the school leader an administrator or academic instructor? If we look at the school leader as playing the role of an administrative head and a manager, then we are essentially looking at leadership as a management issue. The question then is who would be the most effective manager? Does it require a greater share of managerial acumen or skill in public relations and dealing with people? Here we have to again ask if this is enough, or whether the team also needs somebody who is academically oriented and capable of leading the school. It is obvious that the leader cannot be someone who is just good at public relations and dealing with people; more is required. Such a person would not inspire confidence among teachers and would not be able to lead an institution that is able to respond to the ever-changing understanding of instructions. In a sense, at a

*If we look at the school leader as playing the role of an administrative head and a manager, then we are essentially looking at leadership as a management issue. The question then is who would be the most effective manager? Does it require a greater share of managerial acumen or skill in public relations and dealing with people? Here we have to again ask if this is enough, or whether the team also needs somebody who is academically oriented and capable of leading the school.*

fundamental level, the categories in which the school leader can be included are largely those of an administrative head or an instructional leader.

The instructional leader is expected to be able to advice and have a dialogue with teachers. In the current context, when teaching and learning are being redefined with more emphasis on learning, the role of the teacher becomes less predetermined and allows greater possibilities of choices. In this context, the term "learning leader" implies not only the head of the learning institution but also a person who is herself learning. The school then can be considered as a community of learners with the leader being the head of that community. But it is not very clear how this system would function given the expectation that a large structure should work cohesively and in a manner where each person knows his responsibility and ensures that it is fulfilled.

An important point that needs to be mentioned here is that the leadership is also expected to be able to raise support amongst parents and in the wider society. The output of a school is therefore an important concern. For many parents and for society in general the worth of the institutions is in the diplomas earned by students and the grades that they obtain. The school has to produce multitudes of children who do well. So while the teachers and school may have certain views of what is good education, they could be overridden by what parents and society expect and believe. There are

expectations and demands from the environment the schools function in. The school has to match the parent's expectation to retain their interest and continue getting children. It is natural that the functioning of the school is influenced by its environment and the structures that are imposed on it by History. For a leader to move forward it becomes important that she recognizes that there is an external environment and there is an internal environment within which the school processes can be conceptualized.

### The Idea Of A Leader

In general, we can analyze the role of a leader in any structure and break these up into the following forms. These are all broad descriptions of leadership and need to be contextualized to schools and then to a particular school:

1. We could imagine that a leader is more likely to produce socially useful outcomes by setting goals that meet the needs of both the leader and followers. This has the benefit of distinguishing leadership from merely "getting people to do what you want them to do".
2. "Transformational leadership" - Socially useful goals not only have to meet the needs of followers, they also should elevate followers to a higher moral level. In schools this is essential as the teachers have the additional responsibility of setting an example for the students.
3. Viewing leadership in terms of adaptive work. Adaptive work consists of addressing conflicts in the values of different people, or diminishing the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face. Adaptive work requires a change in values, beliefs or behavior. In a context of a school this is crucial because of the porous boundaries within society.

This is the responsibility of and expectation from leadership. The expectation is that a leader would facilitate dialogue, identify insights and ensure that these are shared. A leader needs to motivate and excite teachers to explore ways to improve performances and atmosphere and ensure that teachers and the students have a pleasant and effective involvement. Leadership also needs to look ahead, anticipate changes in situation, look at what new and interesting that is happening in the field and what elements of that are relevant and purposeful. It also needs to be able to deal with difficult situations and tide over inferences and obstructions. The list

of requirements can be longer but these indicate what is essential.

### Leadership Systems

Like in other organizations and structures, schools also can explore different systems of leadership. In most instances, however, whether in schools or in other structures that are exploring collective leadership, eventually there is a need for someone to emerge who is willing to assume greater responsibility. This person would then take on far more responsibility, greater interest and be the focal person to deal with any situation that may arise. She also becomes responsible for facilitating discussions, for ensuring that people do not transgress each others space and listen to ideas and opinions with an open mind. Many who acquire such a responsibility do try to ensure involvement of others in leadership. That, however, does not mean that their responsibility is reduced.

In many structures, the role of the coordinator is with one person for a fixed duration. After her term, somebody

*The expectation is that a leader would facilitate dialogue, identify insights and ensure that these are shared. A leader needs to motivate and excite teachers to explore ways to improve performances and atmosphere and ensure that teachers and the students have a pleasant and effective involvement.*

else from the team would assume that responsibility. The leadership in such a system is, therefore, unfocused and distributed among a larger group. The impact of such a leadership process on a structure can be mixed and there can be arguments and views against or in support of this system. These views emerge from different notions of leadership and the factors that motivate people to work with greater seriousness and engagement.

The debate is not just interesting but also relevant in the context of the school which requires a definition of team/ individual who would ensure dialogue among peers. A

dialogue which needs to be different every day as it responds to the children, their daily experiences and the challenges in the society around. Clearly there are no specific answers as they relate to the context including not only the children, but also the parents and the colleagues. Being a part of the social and a historical context implies that in spite of a fairly defined structure and a large component that is governed by unalterable norms. They have to be in line with the perspective and consistent with the purposes of the school. They also must be strategically acceptable and doable.

The convergence of viewpoints of the teachers is critical for any response to be strategically acceptable. Informal networks can often emerge in large groups. These networks having no consistent patterns and do not necessarily have teachers with the same beliefs and styles. Most discussions in education show a lack of precision and therefore people can be on the same side even though they have comparatively divergent positions. The most important step in order to build an acceptable strategy is to develop a dialogue where discussions can be open. A process in which normatively preferred teaching objectives and strategies can be questioned rationally and alternatives assessed dispassionately. A culture needs to be created where teachers are able to collectively work out and analyze situations and challenges. It is clear that only when there is cohesion among faculty members about convergence on goals and strategies would the student growth be substantial. This cohesion is important because although the classrooms have pre-determined timetables where defined procedures can be followed, no pre-decided structures can guide a teacher in her day-to-day practices as she would encounter a diversity of students and would need a diversity of responses each time. There is no way to predict where the classroom discussions or activity may lead. If there is an acceptable cohesion at the level of goals and strategy then alternate choices could be made by different faculty members. Apparent discord, unhappiness, dissatisfaction and tension in a system that is otherwise functioning is not necessarily a symptom of an improperly run institution. It could also reflect the independence of thought and space that allows it. We have to look for other signs and probe deeper before judging a system. A superficial consensus with everyone voicing the same view may reflect a well run but non-creative, non-reflective system.

### Challenges And Strategies

It is important to recognize that the school leader has to conform to many guidelines. All schools have to follow curricular guidelines that are developed at the national and state level. The guidelines may leave spaces for local decision-making but the main functioning has to be within the boundary of the state curricular expectations and the parameters specified by the district institutions. The principal of a school managed by a large body, for example the government school system, has limited flexibility. Apart from curricular choices that are prescribed at a large level, strategies and operational choices are also predetermined by the system that she is a part of. Sometimes even the structures that exist within the school are pre-decided, leaving her with very little opportunity to create structures appropriate to her instincts and the local needs. For example, a school may not have good Science teachers and can do little in Science but simultaneously have an excellent History faculty. But this is of little account as the leader cannot give more time to History. She cannot also choose to do more of language and Mathematics even if she thinks that is what is more important for her context. She cannot make a timetable that is very different from what is suggested at the district or state level and has to follow broadly similar patterns of classroom processes and assessment. The role of the school leader, therefore, needs to be analyzed carefully and the spaces for choice extracted and emphasized.

It is very easy in such a situation particularly as a part of a large administrative system to feel powerless and incapable of taking any initiative. It may also be argued that the lack

“

*A culture needs to be created where teachers are able to collectively work out and analyze situations and challenges. It is clear that only when there is cohesion among faculty members about convergence on goals and strategies would the student growth be substantial.*

”

of desire to take initiatives stems from the unwillingness to take responsibility. It is safer to follow the routine than to explain your choices and defend them. This is particularly true when the surroundings are not very conducive and it is not easy to get support for transformational processes. The school is not decoupled from society or the larger structure and neither are its academics or administration. Talking about school leadership, therefore, becomes circumscribed by this realization.

Another challenge is that space for the leader is often restricted by local environment and local interests. She does not have the choice to appoint her deputy as the name is pre-decided by the large hierarchical systems. Another scenario could be that the parental aspirations of an up-market chain school can be very different from those of a low-end school and the role and the strategy to be followed by the leader is correspondingly different.

Schools that are a part of a larger chain are limited by its philosophy and its functioning strategy. While some of the traditions in these institutions are often without a well-articulated rationale, these are also so deeply ingrained that it is difficult to change or upstage them. It is important to recognize that there has to be a strategy for overcoming this but it cannot be done by simply taking a decision and executing it. For example, as a new school leader you feel that the current morning assembly consists of non-secular programs or portrays a lack of human freedom and rationality but your colleagues in the school have been doing this for years. They see a value in these prayers, which may be a part of the wider culture as well. Your goal may be

*“How do I proceed? Do I insist on a library immediately, do I forget libraries for some time, or do I try a process of negotiation? Is it purposeful and encouraging to cite the example of a productive person to those who are less productive, or does it make them unhappy, depressed and sulky?” The leader’s job is mind boggling.*

to increase the active participation of children, or planning and conceptualizing the morning assembly with a focus on alternate issues and to develop it as a component of the educational activity. But this can happen only through a gradual involvement supported by sharing and airing of views and possibilities. In order that the team understands the purpose of morning assembly and moves towards an effective program there can be many strategies and a variety of small steps. One extreme way to react for is to argue that since the morning assembly is inappropriate it should be stopped totally. Children will go to directly to the classrooms and start their studies. Another way is to have some congregation where children come together and start with some physical exercise and games. A third view point can be that the time spent on the morning assembly is important and adds to the personality of the child and cannot be done away with. Therefore, the form and content can be changed to some extent but the assembly has to be essentially retained. All these strategies would require negotiations with the already functioning senior school team. These decisions can only be put into operation with their concurrence and participation.

If you were to look at these three above-mentioned strategies dispassionately you will find advantages and disadvantages in each. As a newly appointed leader, what you choose would be determined by your personality and the circumstance. We know the term “leadership” has to include not just the appointed head but also others who in some sense provide role clarity and purposefulness to the school. Should this decision be taken based entirely on what the leader or the leadership team considers as appropriate, or do other factors have to be kept in mind? While this gives the leader an opportunity to open a dialogue on wider issues, it also may imply a lack of authority in the leader. The process of dialogue may be vitiated by a few who are too set in their ways or otherwise unhappy. If there is no possibility of a dialogue and some influential people are adamant, then the role of the leader and the way she builds and protects a dialogue become significant. The choices have to be open for dialogue. As a leader, whether you make the interim decision not to have an assembly or you make it an assembly without prayer or collective singing depends upon the context. From the discussion, it should be clear that even if a leader thinks assemblies are not needed and a waste time or that the school needs to spend more time on school subjects, it is important for her to listen to others.

The idea of leadership in a school is strongly influenced by the manner of functioning of the 'key' person. That, as we have said, is also influenced if not determined by the circumstances she is in. The context of the school is important but so is kind of teacher in the school. When you set up a school you can choose teachers and prepare them and organize them. It is also possible to build a dialogue with them and set up processes for the same. But how do you deal with your role when you are in an institution that is fairly set in its ways? For example, in a particular school, the teachers by and large do not read books themselves and do not encourage children to read, either. The leadership team also believes that reading materials other than academic books are of no use as they do not help in bettering examination results. Then what does the school leader do? Given the way the climate is, it is highly likely that there is no capability in the school to encourage children to read, no systems and perhaps no infrastructure. The questions that again confront the leader are, "How do I proceed? Do I insist on a library immediately, do I forget libraries for some time, or do I try a process of negotiation? Is it purposeful and encouraging to cite the example of a productive person to those who are less productive, or does it make them unhappy, depressed and sulky?"

Many more examples can be considered. In each case, choices would be thrown up. Once considered, the battery of choices and requirements has to be negotiated. The school needs to move towards developing an understanding where there is consensus on the change process. There have to be reasonable arguments constructed for recognizing this as the correct strategy. This has to be in the context of the possibilities and a strategy to be chosen by everyone may not be the best strategy in all circumstances.

But there are some situations that suggest the need for radical steps. For example, the incoming school leadership finds that children are not respected and valued enough. Occasionally children are harassed intentionally, reprimanded and sometimes even hit. What would we want to do then? Would we still look for a strategy that wastes a long time in negotiations or should you begin with the declaration that this is totally unacceptable and cannot be allowed? Or there is a situation where some of the teachers in your team are forcing the children to take tuitions from them. What should the choice be? Of course, whatever the choice there has to be a dialogue for buy-in and gradual understanding, but

can time be wasted in simply suggesting that this cannot be allowed?

We can construct more examples but it is clear that answers are not simple. In situations like these, different people would and do make different choices and see them through. It is also clear that the context is not the only important consideration but also the way the leader interprets the context. The interpretation is a function of our beliefs and capabilities as well.

### Conclusion

We have talked about what the expectations from the key person are and what she can do, and we have also talked about the constraints within which she has to operate. It is

“

*There are suggestions that the leader has to be the most capable and one who is sensitive to all to be recognized as the most appropriate for the role, or that she should have the initiative and drive to take risks, take the blame and give credit to team members and simultaneously be fair and transparent.*

”

clear that unlike many other organizations, the constraints on the school leader are more. They arise from the nature of the 'product' or 'output' and definition of its quality. They are also constrained by the focus on homogenization and the attempt to make a product that everyone would like. This is bound to lead to a clash of opinions and critical observations about the processes followed by individual teachers and the school as well. A leader is expected to act as a shield for the teachers in her school who exercise choice and initiative. She has to protect them from the determinism, strangulation and bureaucratization of the outside forces. In addition she has also to protect them from internal forces where differences in view points can lead to acrimonious sabotage. An important responsibility is to consolidate dialogue and open spaces for listening and acceptance. The leader needs to be able to present her ideas and be patient in listening. She therefore has to fulfill external expectations, communicate

with the outside and the inside and also set up internal communication processes. This obviously is less possible in large systems where the role of the leader becomes largely that of a bureaucratic manager who has to ensure everyone follows procedures and instructions.

Consider all the clichés about leadership. A leader must lead from the front and set examples for others to emulate; the leader must not be an impediment to the growth of others, she must use the knowledge of people, etc. These are just a few examples. But even in these there is some confusion and contradiction. There are suggestions that the leader has to be the most capable and one who is sensitive to all to be recognized as the most appropriate for the role, or that she should have the initiative and drive to take risks, take the blame and give credit to team members and simultaneously be fair and transparent. Others would argue that in order for the leader to encourage everyone and provide space she must be able to genuinely give respect for their capability. She must recognize that in many areas others can do better than her.

It is clear that all these requirements can be argued for and defended. It becomes, therefore, difficult to spell out what leadership needs and what leadership should do. Both the role of the leadership team as well as its development and

selection become specific and contextual.

All of us in our life have been part of the teams that have done significant tasks. In situations where people have to function together, however routine the task may be, a mechanism for ensuring dialogue and aspirations for maximum quality contribution is required. Even in these processes an informal leadership is assumed and accepted by the rest. These leadership roles may also be flexible and may shift from one to the other during the task. There is no fixed identification or selection of the person who will perform this role.

Many of the common notions and statements about leadership are not always usable. They are to be interpreted in context. In particular the oft-repeated common personality orientation to the team leadership that “leaders are born”, is dangerous. It fosters both arbitrary decision making and/or irresponsibility. On the other hand, the recent belief that leaders can be made by organizing one time training sessions is as much of a myth. It appears that leaders emerge in contexts that have sufficient conducive pieces in them. They are a response to a context.

We ought to focus on leadership as an activity – the activity of a citizen from any walk of life to mobilize people towards doing something. In our case, run a school. But what the socially useful activity is and what a good school is, remain contentious.

## References

1. Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009
2. The Elementary Education System In India, Exploring Institutional Structures, Processes and Dynamics, Rashmi Sharma, Vimala Ramachandran, 2009, Routledge
3. Quality Education Programme, Baran – A Baseline Study, Vidya Bhawan Education Resource Centre, Udaipur, Rajasthan
4. (Neelima Khetan, Seva Mandir, Unpublished)

**Preeti Misra** has been working with Vidya Bhawan Education Resource Centre since 2008. For a brief period, she worked with the Vidya Bhawan Schools as part of the school transformation project – which impacted her views more than it did the schools. She can be contacted at [preeti@vidyabhawan.org](mailto:preeti@vidyabhawan.org).

**Hriday Kant Dewan** (Hardy) is a Member of the Founding Group of Eklavya, and currently is the Organizing Secretary cum Educational Advisor of Vidya Bhawan Society, Udaipur. He has been working in the field of education for the last 35 years in different ways and aspects. In particular he has been associated with efforts on educational innovation and modification of the state’s educational structures. He can be contacted at [vbsudr@yahoo.com](mailto:vbsudr@yahoo.com).



*"Teachers' capacities to deal with change, learn from it, and help students learn from it will be critical for the future development of societies".*

As work sites became larger and complex with the industrial revolution, Fredrick Taylor envisioned a new class of employees whose primary responsibility was to maximise output from given human ('workers') and material resources, giving birth to 'scientific management'. Management is increasingly considered a body of knowledge and practice, a process comprising of planning, organising, staffing, directing and controlling<sup>2</sup>. Large school systems have come into being, which present complexities, requiring considerable energies on administration or management<sup>3</sup> activities at both school and system levels. A 'school head' thus is seen to need management skills – how to make school plans, organize required resources to implement these, assess implementation and feedback for planning the next period. This skill set is seen as a full time specialisation distinct from 'academic' tasks like teaching learning, preparing to teach, teacher support etc. Many schools suffer poor management, which affects institutional effectiveness - absence of rigorous long term and short term (annual) planning impacts focus and alignment of work of teachers, poor organising impacts implementation, poor monitoring and feedback mechanisms affect the school's learning from its work/experiences which in turn affects planning. Thus every school needs a good manager.

While we accept that management is essential to a school's functioning, whether it is adequate for the school head to be a manager who does not need deep involvement in the academic aspects of school functioning is a separate question. As a teacher is not a 'minor technician'<sup>4</sup> who implements goals and methods designed elsewhere, a school head's role is not merely to implement plans designed externally, but rather to help create a shared vision amongst the members of the school about its purpose and lead collective energies towards its achievement. The school is a unique social institution – it is society's primary tool for directed yet evolutionary change on a systemic scale, through inter-generational transfer of cultural resources, mediated by visions for the future. Educational aims include creating citizens who would be conscious of their rights and responsibilities, live harmoniously with one another and with nature. The school head needs

a deep understanding of such educational philosophy to set direction for the school's activities.

Secondly, a school needs to have a deep connect with its immediate community and larger society. Our schools tend to be highly detached from their environment, which is one of the reasons for children dropping out of schools as they are not able to easily make meaning of education for themselves. Linking school to the larger societal context has become even more critical given the complexities of modern society. Thirdly, education is an experiential process and the teacher helps the learner construct knowledge in her / his mind. Since 'acculturation' is a key part of such knowledge construction, the teacher needs to highlight, by personal example, a moral purpose and compass. For instance, if democratic processes is something that a child needs to learn, the teachers need to be able to demonstrate its practice consistently, and the school leader needs to be a role model for teachers. Thus every school leader needs to be well versed in the 'basic areas' of philosophy of education, sociology of education and educational psychology, to be able to meaningfully shape the vision of the school. If the school head is only a manager and seeks this understanding from others, there is a danger that the priorities arising from administration would override



“

*Since 'acculturation' is a key part of such knowledge construction, the teacher needs to highlight, by personal example, a moral purpose and compass. For instance, if democratic processes are something that a child needs to learn, the teachers need to be able to demonstrate its practice consistently, and the school leader needs to be a role model for teachers.*

”

goals deriving from these basic areas.

Bush and Glover who studied definitions of education leadership and management state: *"Leadership is a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. Successful leaders develop a vision for their schools based on personal and professional values. They articulate their vision at every opportunity and influence their staff and other stakeholders to share this vision. The philosophy, structures and activities of the schools are geared towards the achievement of this shared vision"*<sup>5</sup>. Rosemary Webb in 'Leading Teaching and Learning in the Primary School'<sup>6</sup> suggests three models of school leadership – educative leadership, instructional leadership and pedagogical leadership. While 'educative leaders' involved themselves in the regular teaching learning in their schools, with much higher workloads relating to the implementation of centralised strategies (government plans/schemes), this is no longer possible. 'Instructional leadership' model focuses on the implementation of the central strategies, towards pre-set benchmarks/standards. However it fails to provide "moral purpose, relationship building and knowledge creation"<sup>7</sup> that pedagogical leadership provides by investing

*In educational institution settings, leadership needs to be much more deliberative, reflective and knowledge based (deeper shared understanding of educational aims and processes would serve as the basis for a shared vision) and this means that school leadership also needs to be decentralized and collaborative, rather than centralized in a single person*

in developing a deep understanding of educational aims and contexts and their school's needs. This enables them to "accept or resist compliance to centrist demands in order to realize the vision they had for their schools".

Note that for business management, the idea of 'shared vision' is relatively new and rare; the vision for business organisations is usually decided by senior management which is answerable primarily to the shareholders; its rank

and file has little role in fashioning this vision. Instructional leadership parallels this business management method of centralised vision. Whereas in educational institution settings, leadership needs to be much more deliberative, reflective and knowledge based (deeper shared understanding of educational aims and processes would serve as the basis for a shared vision) and this means that school leadership also needs to be decentralized and collaborative<sup>8</sup>, rather than centralized in a single person. By this we do not mean that the school leader needs to be an expert in all the subjects or disciplines. That may not be possible for one person, what is essential is a deep understanding of the basic areas - educational aims, role of schools in society and processes of cognition along with knowledge of one any of the disciplines. This enables the school leader to relate to the needs of the school, hold the 'creative tension'<sup>9</sup> between the 'vision' and 'current reality' well enough to be individually resourceful and also help colleagues collaborate in resolving issues towards their vision.

In India most of the discretionary expenditure / plan investment is through centrally sponsored schemes, including DPEP, SSA/RMSA, mid day meals etc. These schemes have detailed and rigid 'norms', making school leader (as well as leaders at state, district, block and cluster levels) implementers of pre-designed programs. Secondly, the leader of the education system in states in India, is usually an Indian Administrative Services (IAS) official, mostly without a specialisation in education, whose focus is usually more on broader administrative goals than on qualitative/richer academic goals. The increasing emphasis on 'management' has also influenced the notion of a school leader as primarily a manager. These factors have perhaps made 'instructional leadership' the norm in Indian schools. The school head is immersed in maintaining registers, providing information for MIS and updates for the BEO and 'higher-ups', supervising construction, managing the mid day meal logistics, ensuring compliance to myriad rules and regulations, answering audits, participating in block level meetings etc. and has little time either for teaching (educative leadership) or for involving fully in teacher support processes and interpreting the norms based on local needs and larger educational aims. Of course there is hardly any time for investing in her/his own learning and professional development as a pedagogical leader.

This is equally true for leadership at other levels. DIET

principals or BRC coordinators are essentially academic leaders. Yet, despite having qualifications in education, many lose touch with regular academic practice – reading, writing, critical thinking, reflective practice, dialogue /argument etc. With their lack of specialisation in education (which the NPE demanded through a distinct IES cadre), many leaders are unable to support the creation of such an academic culture in the schools and the school system. The education system is caught in an existential dilemma – are schools and support institutions academic institutions where autonomy, focus on learning, academic specialisation, spaces for deliberation and reflection are necessary and provided; or, are they just any other government department, where the focus is on compliance, being generalists (one person fits all positions), meeting financial targets and pre-determined time lines. While a state like Karnataka does have a separate education cadre (KES), academic support personnel lack structured possibilities for continuous learning. DIET faculty see their primary role as 'program implementers' of training modules designed at SCERT, and not as academic faculty having a collective responsibility of assessing and supporting the learning needs of their teachers.

Emphasising the 'government servant' identity of the teacher, the school leader and the official in the education system, extends the notion of a 'minor technician' across the system. Experienced officials at district/block levels are largely expected to adhere to norms laid down at central and state levels, rather than collaborate with peers in designing local norms. Instructional leadership also limits focus on academic aspects, with government orders as sole basis for functioning, upward accountability replacing accountability to children, parents and community and the calling of profession. This model prevents schools from becoming autonomous learning institutions, which is necessary for educational excellence, even as instructional leadership sees 'lack of adequate compliance' as the cause for 'poor quality of education'. At a policy (policy is a reflection of educational vision) level, we see rapid and often disjointed changes, sometimes with a change in leadership and 'policy borrowing', a practice in which policies are borrowed from other locations without adequate understanding about their relevance. Rich conversations ('dialogue') at various levels in the education system, could ensure an evolutionary model of 'policy-practice' connection. Relevant and consistent feedback from the field requires both decentralization and

prioritisation on academic aspects in the system which instructional leadership fails to provide.

Unfortunately, we seem to be moving further towards instructional leadership. The current focus on 'business management models' for systemic improvement, emphasising assessment driven / metrics based programs, 'soft skills-building to address attitudinal issues', etc discounts the deeply academic nature of the issues faced by our education system. This is also a global phenomenon, where the problems of inherently public spaces are sought to be solved through management solutions, that may have worked in the business world. For instance, recently, Cathleen P. Black, the chairwomen of Hearst Magazines, was appointed as the new chancellor of the New York City School System for her "extraordinary qualifications as a manager<sup>10</sup>," and "marketing prowess". Lamenting this, Giroux writes, "... In this view, management is divorced from any viable sense of leadership and the connection between schooling and the public good is replaced with a business model of schooling that disregards both the social and any vision not defined by the crudest forms of power, instrumental rationality and mathematical utility, ... which eviscerate from public schooling any vestige of public values, democratic modes of governance, teacher autonomy, critical thinking and a vision of schooling as a space in which to teach students to be critical thinkers and engaged citizens".

Finally, management and academics is not an 'either or' issue, managerial responsibilities are important and management skills are required in school leadership. However, these are trivial in comparison to the complexities of teaching learning and teacher support. In a learning organization, goals established (collaboratively) by the school leader reflect the shared vision of the school and administrative skill though important from the perspective of efficiency does not by itself provide relevance or meaning to the schools purpose. Such 'learning centred leadership'<sup>11</sup> is embedded in continuous and collaborative, individual and systemic learning.

As the head of the 'Education Management' function in Azim Premji Foundation, I used to think that 'education management' specialists did not need a deep understanding of education and that expertise in management tools or applications like spreadsheets which help make complex planning and monitoring an easy task, were sufficient. I

now define Education Leadership and Management as a sub-domain of education, which seeks to apply principles of leadership and management to educational contexts based on educational aims and priorities, for which clear educational perspectives are essential.

I once visited a large government school in Trivandrum, which had two HMs – with distinct academics and administration responsibilities. The roles of VC and registrar of universities too are often similarly patterned, with the

registrar taking a larger load of the administrative aspects to allow the VC to focus on academic matters. With increasing load of administrative tasks, educational system must consider having capable administration person(s) to support pedagogical leaders, rather than reducing the school head to a manager. This requires much higher levels of investment and commitment from all of us, but since education is about the lives of our children and their future, which is in a way the future of humanity, this is the minimum we need to demand of ourselves.

### Footnote

1. FULLAN, MICHAEL G. 1993. Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform, cited in <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2483/Teacher-Learning-Communities.html>
2. From the popular primer on business management – Koontz and O'Donnel. Essentials of Management, An international perspective.
3. I have treated these two terms as largely synonymous for the purpose of this article – comprising of activities that lie outside academic activities that form the core of the education system.
4. "The transmission model of education coupled with the drive for increased efficiency tends to foster the view of the teacher as a minor technician within an industrial process" - Reason and teaching by Israel Scheffler
5. In Early and Weindling, D. "From management to leadership, a changing discourse"
6. Rosemary Webb 2005. Educational Management Administration and Leadership, SAGE
7. Fullan 2001
8. In institutions of higher education, like universities, leadership positions such as Head of Department are sometimes assumed on rotational basis by faculty of the same experience/position
9. Peter Senge, Fifth Discipline
10. Henry A. Giroux. Business Culture and the Death of Public Education: The Triumph of Management Over Leadership . <http://www.truth-out.org/business-culture-and-death-public-education-the-triumph-management-over-leadership65083>
11. Southwest 2003

### References

- Early, P. and Weindling, D.(2004) "A changing discourse: from management to leadership"
- Fullan, Michael G.(1995) 'The evolution of change and the new work of the educational leader
- Koontz and Wehrich, Essentials of Management, An international perspective. Tata McGraw-Hill. 10th Edition
- Quinn, Cheri. L. et al., "Preparing new teachers for leadership roles"
- Senge Peter, The Fifth Discipline: the Art and Practice of the Learning Organization. New York, Doubleday
- Sergiovanni, T. "Leadership and learning"
- Webb, Rosemary. "Leading teaching and learning in the primary school"

---

**Gurumurthy Kasinathan** is the Founder & Director of IT for Change, Founder of Centre for Leadership and Management in Public Services (C-LAMPS) and visiting faculty at TISS MA Education program for the ELM course. He was a consultant at Azim Premji Foundation, Bangalore on Education Leadership and Management and in this role, also worked in the Policy Planning Unit, a collaboration of the Foundation with the Government of Karnataka Education department. He may be contacted at [Guru@ITforChange.net](mailto:Guru@ITforChange.net).



Schools and school systems are complex organizations whose work is crucial for social, economic and cultural reasons. Learning outcomes in school systems also contribute to the personal growth and well-being of learners. Yet goals of schooling are often unclear or under-specified, and outcomes are often difficult to measure. Their social and economic function is widely agreed to be critical but education is often starved of resources. In countries like India schools are parts of large administrative structures that are hierarchical and centralized. They function in extremely complex environments with tremendous cultural and socio-economic diversity. The combination of complexity and social importance has led to much concern about the effectiveness of schools and education systems.

The Indian education system is widely accepted to be of poor quality, both of outcomes and processes. The large public education system is a key piece in this story of deficiency. What would it take to improve the performance of schools? More effective teaching and learning is an obvious answer. Better curricula would be part of it too. It is in this context that many commentators argue for the importance of better management and leadership of schools. They contend that complex organizations need to be managed well. And good leadership is an integral part of good management.

It is easy to see that the above perspective naturally leads to arguments that call for a focus on improving leadership in school systems. It is a traditional assumption in public education departments that teachers attain "seniority" and proceed to become headmasters and B.E.Os. Their long years of service is all that is required to qualify them for leadership

*The identification of leadership as a key element of organizational success has had the effect that people often assume that if an organization is successful, then the leader must be responsible for it.*

roles. This assumption is what votaries of effective school management question.

There is much to commend in this view. In many ways it seems uncontroversial. If schools are organizations with large numbers of stakeholders and participants, with goals and outcomes that are critical for society, then it is almost an axiom that they have to be led and managed. I do not intend to refute this perception. My purpose is to place the idea of school leadership in the context of the History of development of schools as organized structures and to suggest that alternative approaches exist that have relevant lessons to offer. These "lessons" become all the more important if we begin to question the terms of the debate – both aims of education and parameters for what counts as successful leadership.

### **The Leadership Industry**

Many theories of leadership define it as a quality that individuals possess or acquire that enables them to influence other individuals and groups toward a common goal. This has led to tremendous efforts to identify the components of this quality and to specify how such capabilities can be acquired. A large part of this research has originated in studies of business organizations. The huge stakes involved have made "leadership studies" an important and sometimes lucrative element in organizational research.

The identification of leadership as a key element of organizational success has had the effect that people often assume that if an organization is successful, then the leader must be responsible for it. This has, as we know, had a positive impact on top management salaries in organizations. However, contrarian voices warn that organizational success (or failure) is more complex a phenomenon than can be explained by qualities of leaders alone. In spite of the huge amount of time and resources spent on identifying the qualities of a good leader and the processes that may nurture one, the results are a mixed bag. However, I do not intend to go into the critical review of this research here. I shall only touch upon some of the difficulties that traditional models of



leadership face in the challenging contexts of education.

### Life In The Machine

The public school system in India is a vast machine. Its structure is predicated on the assumption that a central authority can prescribe, organize and control performance in even such a vast system. Part of the reason for this centralization can be traced to the colonial agendas that led to the establishment of organized school systems in India. When the education system expanded after independence, organizational innovation through the development of alternative structures was not seriously considered as an option. The existing system was scaled up with near-disastrous results. Even in the private sector, the structure of schools has changed little in a hundred years.

The centralization and rigidity of school systems in India, both public and private, have had a negative impact on their management. Most observers agree that the system is too big to be “steered” effectively. The gradual build-up of vested interests, both political and organizational, militate against change. The recent surge in funding for primary education in India has also had the unwelcome result of cementing the vested interests such that structural change is all the more difficult. Leadership of schools and education departments is, under these conditions, a rather emaciated process. The vast majority of employees in the system are often passive recipients of decisions and commands originating elsewhere. Even the top officials often complain of “powerlessness” to effect change.

### Locating Leadership

Ideas of leadership as the embodiment of traits and qualities in an individual has been held most tenaciously in military organizations. Most successful military campaigns are invariably success stories of leadership and bring much adulation and glory for the general. The second world war generated a rich mythology of great and not so great generals. The industrial revolution and the creation of large hierarchically structured business organizations prompted the development of similar ideas in the civilian realm. This development is quite understandable in light of the peculiar challenges that military and similar structures pose. The need to deploy large numbers of personnel rapidly to execute well-defined battleground strategies or in assembly lines made centralization of command and control the preferred operational strategy. This vested a large part of

the burden of decision making on the top echelons. Personal clarity, intelligence and charisma inevitably play a large role in success here.

I argue in this article that we need to reformulate ideas of leadership in ways that do not locate it merely as a set of traits that individuals possess or as a set of processes that

“

*The recent surge in funding for primary education in India has also had the unwelcome result of cementing the vested interests such that structural change is all the more difficult. Leadership of schools and education departments is, under these conditions, a rather emaciated process.*

”

they initiate. While such a trait based or process based idea of leadership is attractively simple, it has been difficult to find clear evidence that organizational success is inevitably the result of the qualities that the leader exercises. In addition, in sectors that are highly dynamic, where objectives are contested and diverse methods are admissible, such as education, I would like to suggest that alternative conceptions of organizational structuring and leadership may be equally if not more relevant. I will use the rest of this article to expand these thoughts.

Some readers might object that History is full of examples of individuals whose personal qualities unified large populations and focused energies. The sociologist Max Weber called this the exercise of charismatic authority. Gandhi, Mandela and Churchill are immediate examples that come to mind. Hitler, too. I do not deny the impact that charisma has on people. However, the contexts in which such qualities are exercised are usually more circumscribed and less organized. The case of long-lived organizations where people often spend lifetimes, I maintain, is significantly different.

I would like to argue that modern organizations, particularly in the knowledge and education sector, face entirely different challenges. They confront dynamic external environments, unspecified threats, and distributed expertise.

Creative problem solving down to the lowest rung of the organizational ladder is a great advantage. Command and control is extremely inefficient in this environment.

I talked about the notion of leadership as influence. Influencing stakeholders for creative performance and learning defines the nature of schools and schools systems. In that sense, every teacher has to exercise leadership, not just headmasters, directors or I.A.S officers. Such an atomized notion of leadership that locates it at every level of the organization requires an entirely alternative distribution of authority and decision making in schools and school systems. Since our schools rarely empower teachers and other stakeholders in this manner, we are stuck with a military model of organization that is woefully inappropriate for the task it is set up to achieve.

### **A Culture Of Leadership**

Let us visit "Edutopia". This is, for the moment, an imagined society with schools and similar organizations that are significantly different from what I described above in the Indian context. In Edutopia leadership is not the monopoly of particular individuals. People in Edutopia have an alternative formulation of leadership. Leadership here is located in the culture of the schools itself. Such a culture facilitates and encourages initiative, creative thinking and the assuming of responsibility at all levels of the schools and school system. The members of the system are encouraged to envision and "re-vision" its goals and devise creative approaches to achieving them. The environment in which such organizations function is diverse, complex and uneven. The work of the schools in Edutopia is to facilitate learning that is appropriate to the learners' needs and interests. Every teacher is a leader in this sense. Of course, there are people in the "higher levels" of organizations, but their work and influence does not depend on depriving their "subordinates" of autonomy.

I worked, for over two decades, in a small alternative school

outside Bangalore called Centre For Learning that attempts to realize such a structure. The school is teacher-run, non-hierarchical and democratic in its culture. Authority for decision making and possibility of initiative are dispersed. The relationships are collegial and cooperative. The educators in CFL believe that if the aims of education are conceived of in a much wider manner than is customary, conventional leadership fails to achieve goals.

Admittedly, such a structure is almost laughably improbable in the mainstream Indian context. Restructuring schools in ways that disperse authority and distribute autonomy would be considered too risky. There is also, perhaps legitimately, a concern that members of our school systems need to be prepared adequately to make the transition to such a structure. However, such alternative models of organizational leadership are important beacons that give us a glimpse of new possibilities. Even if such experiments "fail" they provide valuable lessons.

Radical social theorists who consider present organizational forms of schools as the reflection of existing power relationships in society may, skeptically, object that schools function more as the defenders of the status quo than as harbingers of change. They function to reproduce and defend existing structures of power and privilege as manifested in society. Why would such systems invite the disturbance that more democratic forms imply? Perhaps the answer is that education that promotes social justice, by nurturing critical capacities and facilitating learning that is responsive to individual needs has to be more egalitarian at the organizational level itself. It is through embedding leadership in the organizational practices and the autonomous initiatives of their members that we increase the probability of increased well-being and justice. If such structures are improbable, the larger goals of social justice and "well-being for all", become improbable too. As educators, we must resist the temptation to surrender to the status quo and must sustain the exploration of paths to change.

---

**Venu** is a member of the faculty of Azim Premji University and a co-coordinator of the Mind and Society Initiative. He has been active for over two decades in school education, as a teacher and as one of the founders of Centre For Learning, Bangalore. His email id: venu@apu.edu.in



The headmaster is the leader of his or her school, but also part of a larger 'system', which comprises an institutional structure, a set of management practices, theories and practices about the nature of learning, approaches and specific strategies for equity. The overall goals of the system, and consequently of a government school headmaster, are embedded in the Constitution, the legal framework and government policies. These, however, have to be interpreted against the social context in which the school is situated. The extent to which these goals can be fulfilled depend on the characteristics of 'the system' i.e., institutional structure and capacity, political and administrative ethos, assumptions about the child and learning, management and pedagogic practices.

The headmaster, as the leader of the school, may be expected to set and achieve goals for the school in collaboration with his/her colleagues, parents and students. However, as a headmaster within a larger school system, his/ her goals and the capacity to achieve them are shaped by the larger system and its characteristics. We shall examine here the influence that the system exerts on the headmaster.

### The System And The Headmaster's Goals

The Indian Constitution envisages a right to education for all children between the ages of six to fourteen years, and also envisages the promotion of equity. The Right to Education Act (RTE) and the National Policy of Education 1992 detail out this right: providing for certain basic minimum number of teachers and facilities, a structure for ensuring the quality of education, strategies for ensuring equity etc.

The aims articulated in the Constitution, legal and policy frameworks derive their meaning in our specific social context. The traditional inequities in our society based on caste, gender and land ownership, are complemented by more contemporary inequities of wealth in a phase of high economic growth. Economic growth can be a great opportunity for redistribution, as it is easier to distribute growth than existing assets, and an ever larger number of people can reap the fruits of prosperity. Equal opportunity for education for all can be a key driver for such redistribution.

Yet, recent studies show that the school education story is promoting more inequity in India. There is a well documented separation of schools based on socioeconomic status, with

better off children attending private schools and the less well off, girls, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children, working children etc attending government schools, while the really poor and deprived, do not even complete the mandated eight years of schooling (Nambissan 2005, Ramachandran 2003).

In this context, the two important concerns from the policy perspective are: *ensuring that all children complete at least eight years of school, and maintaining quality in government schools.* If all children attend school, and government schools provide high quality education, then all and not just some children will fulfill their potential, and the current trend of differential educational opportunities for children based on their socio-economic status will be undercut. The Constitution, RTE and our policies very clearly support the creation of inclusive and high quality government schools. In this sense, our laws and policies throw up a challenge for the headmaster, i.e. to lead his or her school to excellence, and provide a space for creative and meaningful leadership.

### Achieving Goals In The Systemic Context

Let us now ask a more difficult question. To what extent does the system enable and assist the headmaster in achieving these goals for his or her school?

Leaders, who are part of large systems, as are government school headmasters, exercise their leadership in a given 'systemic' context. This type of leadership is different from the kind exercised by the headmaster of a private school.

*The headmaster, as the leader of the school, may be expected to set and achieve goals for the school in collaboration with his colleagues, parents and students. However, as a headmaster within a larger school system, his goals and the capacity to achieve them are shaped by the larger system and its characteristics.*

The private school headmaster has to basically satisfy parents, students and the school board or management, though he or she too has to follow some government norms such as curricula, examinations etc., and is likely to have a fair degree of autonomy. The government school master on the other hand, has to satisfy a larger system and work within its practices, rules and regulations and exercises partial leadership. But the government school headmaster can also benefit from the resources that large systems can develop, such as well planned training programmes, shared knowledge resources, learning from peers etc. vis-à-vis the private school teacher. The government school headmaster has a disadvantage in terms of autonomy, but advantage in terms of access to intellectual and other resources.

I argue, however, that at the present juncture, the system undercuts even the partial leadership of school headmaster, while inadequately compensating with greater intellectual and other resources.

The leadership role of the headmaster is constrained by hierarchy, centralizations and rigidity. The school system is extremely hierarchical and the school is placed at the bottom of this hierarchy (Sharma 2009). Such a system may be appropriate for an army, but has little relevance for an educational institution. It is also highly centralized. Teachers are posted to the school or posted out by higher authorities, the curriculum and textbooks are prescribed and teachers are often trained without much concern about the needs and convenience of the school. The school is seen largely as 'receiver of orders', whether these be about the time table, celebrating events, collecting information, etc. The system is rigid, so that rules have to be applied whether or not they are relevant. So pervasive is the hierarchy, rigidity and centralization, that many headmasters choose to be followers of orders even where they do have autonomy.

This constrains the headmaster's initiative and the ability to devise context specific solutions. As headmasters function on the basis of a series of top-down instructions, they have little room to address the specific needs of the students, or innovate. This leaves little room for excellence. Moreover, the school becomes an alien institution, serving the commands of some distant officials rather following a plan embedded within the needs of the community. In such a scenario, the headmaster may not be able to draw support from the community and may in fact, face considerable hostility.

The advantage of intellectual and other resources that a larger system can provide are not really available to the headmaster, as the Indian system has not developed its resource institutions adequately. Our State Councils for Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) and District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) have yet to become vibrant producers and sharers of knowledge. The quality of teacher training programmes is highly variable. There is very little meaningful discourse on education and the nature of learning within the system (Dewan 2009). Consequently, the headmaster gains little in terms of real academic support from the system. He or she may have to follow a host of academic 'orders', but these do not enable better teaching and learning in the school.

Along with a lack of intellectual vibrancy, the headmaster also deals with the culture of patronage and corruption that pervades the system and impacts education deeply. Teachers' postings are an important way in which the whole system is reoriented towards the interests of the powerful rather than towards fulfilling the goals stated in the Constitution (Sharma 2009). In most States, teachers' postings are patronage based. The better connected teachers can get 'good' postings, i.e. in urban schools, while the less powerful are posted in poorly connected villages. This instills a sense of unfairness among teachers and de-motivates them. Other unethical practices such as teacher absenteeism emerge, as teachers may 'tie up' with their supervisors to overlook their absence. Favoured teachers may be 'attached' to more convenient and urban schools, so that headmasters

*The leadership role of the headmaster is constrained by hierarchy, centralizations and rigidity. The school system is extremely hierarchical and the school is placed at the bottom of this hierarchy. Such a system may be appropriate for an army, but has little relevance for an educational institution.*

in poorly connected rural schools have to deal with teacher shortages and absence. The prevalence of patronage based functioning and corruption creates an atmosphere where individual interests are placed over institutional goals, and therefore erodes the integrity of institutions.

Finally, the system offers few rewards to individuals who remain committed in spite of the context in which they function. We have no way of recognizing and honouring really good teachers and headmasters. Not only are such individuals not recognized in the formal sense of promotions and the like, but may go totally unnoticed, so that the pursuit of excellence remains a lonely journey without even the occasional compensation of recognition and appreciation that motivates all human beings.

### Summing Up

The above discussion indicates that important shifts are required within the system, if the headmaster is to be supported as the leader of an intellectually vibrant school sensitive to the needs of the community. Our Constitution, laws and policies spell out clearly the need for high quality and inclusive government schools. But to enable the headmaster to achieve this, the system needs to shift from the hierarchical, 'order giving' role to a more supportive one, in which a school may define its goals in its particular context, giving greater autonomy to the headmaster. This must however, be matched with rich academic support and management practices that motivate teachers and employees. Reform within the system is key if headmasters are to realize the potential of their schools.

### References

1. Nambissan (2005) Terms of Inclusion-Dalits and the Right to Education in Ravi Kumar (ed.) The Challenge of Education in India. New Delhi. Sage Publications
2. Ramachandran, Vimala (2003) Gender and Social Equity in Primary Education-Hierarchies of Access. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
3. Sharma, Rashmi (2009) The Internal Dynamic in The Elementary Education System in India: Exploring Institutional Structures, Processes and Dynamics edited by Rashmi Sharma and Vimala Ramachandran. New Delhi. Routledge Press.
4. Dewan, Hriday Kant (2009) Teaching and Learning- The Practices in The Elementary Education System in India: Exploring Institutional Structures, Processes and Dynamics edited by Rashmi Sharma and Vimala Ramachandran. New Delhi. Routledge Press.

---

**Rashmi Sharma** is an Indian Administrative Service officer of the Madhya Pradesh cadre. She is interested in governance and its improvement in general, with school education and decentralization (Panchayati Raj) as focus areas. She has written two books, 'Local Government in India: Policy and Practice' (coauthored with Vimala Ramachandran) 'The Elementary Education System in India: A Study of Institutional Structures, Process and Dynamics' and several articles. She may be contacted on rashmisb2001@hotmail.com.



"Most students in our state enrol in school, but we now need methods by which they will actually learn!"- senior government leader.

"We expect our grantees to measure quality of student outcomes; we would like to explore linking funding to outcomes." - Head of a leading funding agency.

"Excellence is a key value for us in our programs." - CEO of a non-profit organization.

"We need to help the public school system in improving quality."- Industry leader.

**A**s a country we have made significant positive strides in access and enrolment, and in providing basic facilities in schools. The next big challenge in primary schooling is the **quality of education**. As these quotes also suggest, this challenge is now widely acknowledged.

Assessments by independent entities, parent migration to private schools especially in urban areas, active debate generated by non-profits and strong push from funders, have all emphasised the tremendous magnitude of the quality gap and helped create awareness. Over the last few years, a large number of initiatives – led by governments, non-profits and for-profits – have been launched and driven around the country, to improve quality of education. While these are great starting points, in many situations, they have been insufficient for two key reasons.

First, many system leaders (state governments and municipal corporations) rightly question which are the best global experiences to learn from. For example, while we know that Singapore is able to attract students from the top 30% of each graduating batch into teaching, it is unclear whether this will be possible in India. Similarly, we know that New York provides significant autonomy to schools in return for performance; again, the implications for India are unclear.

Second, while some of the current initiatives in India have achieved a great deal, many face challenges on one or more of three key dimensions – scalability, depth of impact, and sustainability.



**Mona  
Mourshed**



**Ramesh  
Mangaleswaran**



**Ramya  
Venkataraman**

This article applies the global learnings on school system transformation developed by McKinsey & Company, along with our experiences in India, to provide a few starting thoughts on what it might take to transform the public school system in your state or district or city.

### What We Can Learn From School System Transformations Around The World?

How does a system with poor performance become good? And how does a good system become great? Specifically, what interventions move a system from one stage to the next? Which aspects of this journey are universal and which are specific to your own context? And how does a system ignite and sustain improvement?

These are some of the questions we have attempted to answer in our recent report, "How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better" – based on our experiences in working with school systems over the years, and more specifically, on in-depth research on the transformation journeys of 20 school systems from all over the world, each with a different starting level of performance.

While the full report and the executive summary can be accessed on-line<sup>1</sup>, here is a summary of key findings relevant to the Indian context.

**First, a system can make significant gains from wherever it starts – and these gains can be achieved in six years or less.** For instance, Latvian students in 2006 demonstrated performance that was half a school-year advanced to that of students in 2000. In Long Beach, six years of interventions increased student performance in grade four and five math by 50% and 75% respectively. Some systems have shown significant improvement in even shorter time frames. For example, systems starting from low levels of performance, such as Minas Gerais in Brazil and

Western Cape in South Africa, have significantly improved their literacy and numeracy levels within just two to four years, while making strides in narrowing the achievement gap between students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

**Second, and most importantly, each particular stage of the school system improvement journey is associated with a unique set of interventions.** Our research suggests the “poor to fair” journey looks very different from the “good to great” journey. At the same time, within each of these stages, there are strong patterns – irrespective of culture, geography, politics, or History. There is a consistent cluster of interventions that moves systems from poor performance to fair, a second cluster of interventions does the same from fair performance to good, a third cluster from good performance to great, and yet another from great performance to excellent.

Poor to fair journeys<sup>2</sup> focus on getting the basics of literacy and numeracy in place. This typically involves: providing scaffolding or day-to-day support and motivation for low skill teachers and principals through elements like highly scripted and standardized lesson plans and regular coaching; getting all schools to a minimum quality standard through data-gathering systems, use of assessments, and centrally prepared teaching-learning resources; and improving access and enrolment where that is still an issue. On the other hand, systems on the path from good performance to great<sup>3</sup> focused on shaping the teaching profession such that its requirements, practices, and career paths are as clearly defined as those in medicine and law.

This suggests that systems would do well to learn from those at a similar stage of the journey, rather than from those that are at significantly different levels of performance. It also shows that systems cannot continue to improve by simply doing more of what brought them past success.

**Third, there is too little focus on ‘process’ in the debate today.** Improving system performance ultimately comes down to improving the learning experience of students in their classrooms. School systems do three things to achieve this goal – they change their structure by establishing new institutions or school types, or changing system responsibilities; they change their resources by adding more education staff to schools or by increasing system funding; and, they change their processes by modifying curriculum

and improving the way that teachers instruct and principals lead. The public debate often centers on structure and resource due to their stakeholder implications. However, we find that the vast majority of interventions made by the improving systems in our sample (over 70% of the examples) are ‘process’ in nature; and, within this area, improving systems generally spend more of their activity on improving how instruction is delivered than on changing the content of what is delivered.

**Fourth, a system’s context does determine how something is done.** Though each performance stage is associated with a common set of interventions, there is substantial variation in how a system implements these interventions with regard to their sequence, timing, and roll-out – there is little or no evidence of a “one-size-fits-all” approach to reform implementation. For example, our interviews with system leaders suggests that one of the most important implementation decisions is the emphasis a system places on mandating versus persuading stakeholders to comply with reforms; the systems we studied have adopted different combinations of mandating and persuading to implement the same set of interventions.

### **How To Think Of A Transformation Approach For A State, City Or District In India?**

As mentioned in the beginning of this article, India’s public school systems face significant gaps in quality of education, as measured by third party assessments and also acknowledged by government and industry leaders. Further, even though enrolment levels are high, we face challenges with respect to retention of students, which is also partly related to quality.

Given this situation, we believe that the interventions used in “poor to fair” journeys are likely to be most relevant for us in the near term, with some states and cities potentially undergoing “fair to good” journeys soon.

Therefore, a cluster of five interventions are likely to be most relevant in the Indian context: low stakes, regular, third party based student assessment and “light touch” performance management (i.e. use of transparency, support and positive incentives); teacher support through standardized pedagogy toolkits and field-and-forum based training and coaching; developing headmasters into school leaders with the explicit role of managing student outcomes, field-and-forum based training and coaching, and gradual movement

to instructional leadership or coaching of teachers; selective use of technology, especially in administrative activities and teacher training; and systematic private participation with strong accountability.

These are broad interventions that, we believe, are likely to be most relevant for India as a whole. The specific transformation design for each state or city will of course vary based on the context. Further, as our global research also shows, there are important contextual considerations for how to start and implement such a transformation.

The rest of this section captures a few key design principles to keep in view while thinking of a school system transformation approach for your state, city or district.

**A structured diagnostic, including a view of student learning:** As is obvious from the learnings above, it is important to first get a clear view of what the school system's starting point is. This requires a structured fact-based qualitative diagnostic – that includes input and outcome parameters – through analyses, interviews, and observations. A third-party-based assessment of student learning outcomes is a critical part of such a diagnostic; this is particularly important given that we do not have any standardised national assessment of student competencies at different levels.

**Well-prioritized basket of inter-linked interventions:** Many of the education reform efforts in India have swung to one of two extremes – either trying to drive reform with just a single initiative or trying to do too many things. Instead, based on the diagnostic of the system, it is critical to identify the “minimum combination of inter-linked interventions” that will lead to improvement at scale, in a significant and sustained manner. For example, if headmasters are expected to play a significant managerial role in the school, their administrative workload may need to be reduced by using an MIS system. If teachers are being trained on a certain new pedagogy, headmasters may need enough understanding of this, to be supportive of it and motivate teachers to use it.

**A minimum combination of scale, depth and sustainability in a reasonably short time frame:** As suggested earlier, many interventions in India have fallen short on one of these three dimensions. For example, there are several high quality models (e.g. after-school centres, vocational programs for senior students, community involvement drives, even full schools, etc.) run by NGOs on

a small scale. The small scale of such initiatives, in addition to the sometimes higher costs and unique resources utilised by them, render them non-replicable in the broader system. On the other hand, there are a few large scale efforts (e.g. basic literacy drives, large scale remediation programs, etc.) run by both governments and NGOs that have achieved scale but with limited depth in terms of extent of change in learning outcomes or quality. Finally, many non-government initiatives have struggled to integrate into the system and many government initiatives have faced the phenomenon of “stopping when the program ends” or “stopping when there is a government change”. The transformation design needs to take these three factors into account clearly: **Scale:** a big enough early pilot, X% of the system covered in 2-3 years and a time-bound plan to cover the rest; **Depth:** focus on early measurable changes in behaviours and practices even in the first year of a program, appropriate pedagogy and enough classroom support to ensure significant change in quality of student outcomes in at least select levels and themes in 3-4 years; **Sustainability:** use of a range of options; e.g. a partly autonomous “institution” for carrying the reform forward, strong frontline buy-in through a few quick wins and focus on capability-building, structured program management, active leveraging of donors and reputed external persons as catalysts and for accountability and building the reform into the system's on-going budget.

**The district as the unit of reform, but with strong state alignment:** From our experiences in India, we believe that the optimal “unit” of reform would be the district (or in the case of big cities, the city itself). This would mean that the transformation design - what interventions, sequence and roll-out plan, design of each intervention such as the detailed method for on-the-field coaching for teachers, and so on – is owned at the district level, with implementation driven tightly at the block and school level.

However, it is critical that the state government provides the mandate for and is strongly aligned with the transformation initiatives, and in fact, treats it as a “pilot” that can be customized and rolled out state-wide. For example, if the teachers in the pilot district are being trained in a certain manner, the SCERT of the state needs to recognize this alternative model as a strong experiment that it could possibly adopt across the state. This is particularly critical in the case of policy-related interventions (e.g. changes in recruiting norms) or initiatives with significant implementation

synergies (e.g. assessment of student learning is best done throughout the state at the same time).

**Multi-pronged partnership approach:** India has the great advantage of a rich fabric of civil society organizations and a strong and growing base of international donors and corporate philanthropy arms. However, very often, in our reform efforts, the roles of different possible entities are either unclear or not in line with their biggest strengths. For school system transformation in a state, district or city, a multi-pronged partnership with clearly defined roles would work most effectively. **The government** provides the mandate for the reform, key decisions, ownership and support from key officers, and over 90 per cent of the funding through its regular budgets. A set of potential **funding partners** bring “catalytic funding” – less than 10 per cent of the cost, but allowing the 90 per cent to be used effectively, especially in the early stages of a transformation – become part of a steering group for both support and

accountability, and provide inputs into the overall direction of the transformation. A set of potential **implementation partners or experts** bring expertise on specific themes, on-the-ground delivery of specific elements, and capability-building in the system on technical aspects. Finally, a potential **program management unit** ensures consistent program design, the use of best practices, strong program management, tracking of outcomes, system capability-building, and elements of long-term sustainability.

Improving the quality of student outcomes is a critical priority for school systems across India. Global school system transformations, especially those starting from situations similar to ours, show both the inspiring possibility of achieving this in a reasonably short time frame, and the need for a systematic and well-designed approach. With such focused efforts, we can be hopeful that Indian states and cities can move on from the current achievements of access and enrolment, to the next horizon of high quality education.

### References

1. [http://www.mckinsey.com/client-service/Social\\_Sector/our\\_practices/Education/Knowledge\\_Highlights/How%20School%20Systems%20Get%20Better.aspx](http://www.mckinsey.com/client-service/Social_Sector/our_practices/Education/Knowledge_Highlights/How%20School%20Systems%20Get%20Better.aspx)
2. Examples of systems that have made this transition include: Chile (from 2001 onward), Minas Gerais in Brazil (2003 onward), Western Cape in South Africa (from 2003 onward)
3. Examples of systems that have made this transition include: Singapore (from 1988 to 1998), Hong Kong (from 1989 to 1999), Boston (from 2006 onward), Long Beach from 2005 onward

---

**Mona Mourshed** is co-leader of McKinsey’s global education practice

**Ramya Venkataraman** is leader of McKinsey’s education practice in India.

**Ramesh Mangaleswaran** is overall leader of McKinsey’s social sector practice in Asia, including education, healthcare and economic development.





I cannot deny that I am a trained management professional. Not because I have done formal management education for full four years but because I joined an organization which was at a cusp of change – way back in 1976. The four years of formal education just initiated me to the concept of management and nothing beyond. The real school of management for me was the organization I worked with for 26 years and more.

When I began my career with Azim Premji Foundation, I found enormous resistance to the word “management” in the NGO world. Whereas in our analysis, the most critical problems in poor quality education system were related to absence of a shared vision, lack of strategy, inappropriate structures, low quality people development and policies that did not support people empowerment. The issues were related to poor governance, centralization of power and non-participation of people in making decisions that affected them.

In other words, it was a huge problem of an effective management of a large system.

**To support my claim, I am presenting below just six issues:**

- 1. Creating a shared vision of education** – National Policy for Education in many ways is the vision document for the nation. National Curriculum Framework – another important document describes the philosophy of education for the country and together, these two documents set the education agenda for India. However, the ignorance on both these documents among majority of the people engaged in education (including the teachers) is shocking. How do you expect the country to achieve anything in education when the agenda is not clear to most people engaged in delivering that agenda?
- 2. Accountability for results:** the adage “what gets measured gets done” would have been so appropriate for the education execution. On an average over 50% students appearing for the tenth standard board examination across the country fail. Who is accountable for this performance? The state education minister? The education secretary? The teacher? Currently only the failing student or his/her parents are held responsible.

Almost 50% students in the fifth grade are unable to read simple text in their mother tongue. Whose accountability is it to ensure this? To enable

accountability you need risk-reward framework that encourages better performance through appropriate recognition.

- 3. Competency based people practices:** Some years ago, when I raised the issue of evolving criteria for teacher appointment beyond the existing system of considering just the marks obtained in the B Ed examination, only two members in the special national level panel for teacher education supported me. When I gave an example from service industry that created almost half a million professionals in hospitality and service industry in the past ten years – everyone scoffed at me as a useless guy who has some corporate management background. Their point was – the job of teachers and that of service industry people cannot be compared – because it is too complex and too fundamental to the future of our country. Therefore, I argued – how can we select people for such a critical role merely on the basis of their B Ed marks? The committee ignored my questions.
- 4. Implementing large programs need high degree of management skills:** the midday meal program for instance has a budget of around Rs. 3000 crore and caters to about 110 million children in primary schools. The program is supposed to deliver around 400 calories, 12 grams of protein and supply of micronutrients to each child each day as per government’s own policy. In reality, the program involves three departments of the government: the education department that is responsible for supplying cooked meal, the food ministry to ensure adequate quantity of food grain supply and the panchayat raj department that has the ultimate responsibility to supply grains to the school. Today we have a very uneven quality of food across schools, the calorie and proteins are much lower and the micronutrients are almost non-existent. The program cannot succeed unless planned well and unless the people

involved understand the purpose of the program.

5. **Execution is everything:** Several incentive programs are introduced by almost all state Governments; that include free text books, free uniforms, cycles for girl children etc. In many cases, the benefit either does not reach the child or reaches very late. Illustratively, if the text books reach the child six months later (which it often does) – the child is at a loss. The child has to either go without study or force his/her parents to buy books though they cannot afford. In many cases, since the uniforms don't reach on time, the children are forced to wash their uniform overnight and wear them even if they are torn.
6. **Performance of vital institutions:** In order to give effect to its policies, the Government created institutions such as the NCERT, NUEPA, DSCERT, DIETs and resource agencies at the block and the cluster level. Today these institutions suffer with several infirmities - primarily due to people not being appointed based on necessary competence (many of these – especially at the district level are parking places for non-performing people), inadequate infrastructure, critical posts being vacant, non-existent quality parameters and above all, non-monitoring of performance of these institutions. The National Policy for Education clearly articulated the need to continuously provide resources for reviewing how machineries are functioning.
7. **Getting the best out of available funds** The overall spending on school education in the country is in excess

of US\$ 14 billion (approximately Rs. 63000 crore) per annum. 90% of this amount is spent on teacher salary – however, hardly any effort is made to ensure that the teachers are well prepared and well developed to be able to meet the expectations of their role. Almost Rs. 1000 crore are budgeted for in-service teacher development program but no teachers find the training useful for their work. Successful corporate organizations spend upto 5% of their total manpower expenses for the purpose of making the system work. Such a concept is unknown to the government system.

Education is a complex process especially in a country like India that is characterized by socio-economic, cultural and linguistic diversity. There is a need to act with a very high degree of efficiency, precision and meticulous planning and monitoring. These are nothing but management issues.

The country is trying to manage 1.3 million schools across 30 states and 640 districts that are supposed to benefit 220 million children who are the future citizens. And over 6.5 million education functionaries are engaged in this execution. To make things worse, there is constant political interference, high leakages of funds, rent seeking across levels and complete absence of risk-reward system to promote accountability. Bureaucrats are frequently transferred – creating discontinuity of plans and vision.

You require highly sophisticated and well crafted public systems to manage such a huge delivery system.

---

**Dileep Ranjekar** is the CEO of Azim Premji Foundation. He may be contacted at [dkr@azimpremjifoundation.org](mailto:dkr@azimpremjifoundation.org).





Section B

---

**Some Perspectives**

The last six months have been an educative experience. I am part of a group of researchers who were looking for good practices in decentralised school management for quality inclusive education in government schools. We were informed that the Communitisation initiative in Nagaland is a good model whereby the day-to-day management of the elementary school (and other social sector programmes in health and child development) have been delegated to the community, as represented by the village council. Our first stop was a school not far from Dimapur to meet with a group of people led by the head of the village council, a few parents, the headmaster of the school and other local leaders comprise of the Village Education Committee (VEC). We were informed that the communitisation process has empowered the VEC to manage the school. They disburse salaries and grant casual leave to teachers and the staff of the school, procure furniture and stationery and appoint substitute teachers against long-term vacancy. They are also authorized to enforce no-work-no-pay rule and absence without proper application or reason could lead to withholding the salary for the days absent. They work with the Headmaster to ensure universal enrolment and retention of children. They also manage the school funds and where necessary mobilize additional resources in cash and kind. It is, however, significant that they do not see themselves as providing leadership in academic matters. What was interesting is that the VEC chairman and the Headmaster work together as a team – they provide leadership to the school. The Nagaland Government Communitisation Act provides the legal framework for devolution of powers.

Field visits to well-managed schools in other states also reveal that the Headmaster is not able to act alone. He/she can become an effective leader when (a) they have the administrative mandate to manage teachers – including ensuring their regularity, granting leave and streamlining additional duties; (b) have a good working relationship with an active VEC or School Development and Management Committee (SDMC) that is responsive, (c) has the support of the administrative oversight bodies like the Block and Cluster Resource Centers and Block Education Officer, (d) receives the funds regularly and all the incentives meant for children are delivered on time and (e) most importantly can ensure teachers get academic support when needed and are able

to determine their capacity building needs.

Leadership at the school level is a complex issue – a highly motivated and creative headmaster could do a lot to make sure his/her school is a well integrated institution and that the children are cared for and taught in a nurturing environment. However, such leaders are few. In the absence of a supportive environment and required administrative authority – most head masters say that they are not able to do much.

Many teachers we interviewed said that they could at best ensure that teachers are present – but are at a loss in making sure that they teach, or prevent them being allocated other duties. For example, before the passing of RTE Act, we found that teachers in Rajasthan were given additional work by the district administration and some were even asked to monitor self-help groups. Teachers in West Bengal were preoccupied with political party work. Teachers in many states were absent and found to be engaged in private businesses. Therefore, even when teachers were present, teaching time in schools was limited. The headmasters also said that – given the informal system of power and patronage, they could do nothing if teachers spent time chatting on their mobile phones. The problem of teacher absenteeism and lack of motivation is rooted in the management ethos of



“

*In the absence of a supportive environment and required administrative authority – most head masters say that they are not able to do much.*

”

a given state. As Rashmi Sharma points out “Teacher motivation needs to be seen against the signals that were being given to the teacher through supervision that had little to do with the teaching-learning process, meagre academic

resource support, and in the case of Rajasthan, the threat of transfers.” (Sharma and Ramachandran, 2009)

The Nagaland example is one of its kind. The basic issue is that systemic improvement through decentralization and increased community participation has been recommended time and again. The hard fact is that the space for people’s participation is intimately related to administrative and political practices in the states. Equality, making the schools functionally autonomous with a leader in-charge is also related to the larger administrative and political environment. Where the formal system promotes centralization and the informal sub-system exacerbates it – thereby sidelining the headmaster and community-based institutions. Similarly, where the formal system delegates powers to the headmaster, it could be undermined by an informal system that makes sure the headmaster has little authority over the teachers or any other critical input like granting leave, ensuring attendance, ensuring adequate teaching time and of course teacher training.

The education system as a whole needs to be geared to create space for autonomous working at different levels. Given the legacy from the pre-independence period, the force that has driven the system is centralization and control. Even after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment devolving powers to local self-government institutions, the school as an institution has remained outside the ambit of the panchayat. The teachers and headmasters continue to be seen as government functionaries who are accountable to their bosses in the district and state administration. They have a fixed place and status in the hierarchy and as so many studies have shown, they have little say in the way the school is run. Almost all aspects of the school are decided at higher levels – leaving the headmaster and his/her teachers as implementers of government directives.

### **Can The 2010 Right To Education Act Make A Difference On The Ground?**

This new constitutional right to education proposes far reaching changes in the way our schools are run. First, the Act defines what a school is and also clearly stipulates the appropriate authority at different levels. The local authority – (Municipal Corporation/Council, Zilla Parishad, Nagar Parishad and the Panchayat) is to ensure availability, admit all children into the school, maintain records of all children in their area, even decide the local calendar and

ensure adequate number of teachers in accordance with the RTE Act. Interestingly quality assurance is left to the local authority. However, the school itself is expected to adhere to the norms of RTE Act while admitting children, ensuring age appropriate admission, organize special training, refrain from all forms of corporal punishment and provide a child friendly learning environment. The Act then goes on to stipulate the responsibilities of the School Development and Management Committee (SDMC) – and its main task is to prepare the School Development Plan.

The RTE Act seeks to promote leadership at the school level by giving the SDMC the task of preparing the school development plan, which essentially means that all the needs of the school – infrastructure, teachers, facilities, library, play ground, books, mid day meal, sanitation and water – has to be reflected in the plan. Yet, interestingly, the teacher’s appointment continues to be done by the government and they are not brought under the ambit of the SDMC.

*Equality, making the schools functionally autonomous with a leader in-charge is also related to the larger administrative and political environment. Where the formal system promotes centralization and the informal sub-system exacerbates it – thereby sidelining the headmaster and community-based institutions.*

### **There Are Still Many Unanswered Questions.**

- Who will provide school level leadership: the SDMC Chairperson or the headmaster?
- Will the SDMC be an appointed body or will it be elected?
- If it is appointed then who will be the nominating authority? Will the Panchayat have a say? Or will the block/or cluster level education administration nominate them?

- Will the headmaster and teachers come under the purview of the SDMC or will they be independent of it?
- Who are the teachers answerable to? The headmaster? The SDMC? The local administration?

Ultimately the question of school leadership is inextricably linked to the larger system. Travelling across several states and speaking to teachers has only raised more questions in my mind. The education system does not look towards the headmaster to provide leadership – in fact most of the headmasters we spoke to said they received almost no specialized training to manage the school. The RTE Act and administrators look towards the SDMC to provide leadership. However, in almost all the states the SDMC chairperson and majority of the members did not send their children

to the local government school. This was also the case in Nagaland. Given that the government school caters to the very poor and given the power relations in our community – the leadership of the SDMC would have really no stake in enhancing the quality of education in the schools. At best, they may try and manage the infrastructure and facilities with greater transparency.

Somewhere the issue of leadership has got lost in the larger rhetoric of decentralization and devolution of powers. Unfortunately, even the RTE Act is not clear on this. Only NCF 2005 underscored the importance of teacher agency and autonomy – but we have not heard much about it since then. All this does not bode well for our schools or for leadership.

---

**Vimala Ramachandran**, Director of Educational Resource Unit – a group of researchers and practitioners working on education and empowerment. She was among the team of architects and first National Project Director of Mahila Samakhya (1988-1993) – a Government of India program on women’s education based in the Department of Education, MHRD. She was founder and Managing Trustee of HealthWatch – a women’s health network - from 1994 to 2004. She has published extensively on elementary education, gender issues and women’s empowerment. She may be contacted at [erudelhi@gmail.com](mailto:erudelhi@gmail.com)



*The teachings are nothing but common sense*

.....**J.Krishnamurti**

*It is not bigotry to be certain we are right; but it is bigotry to be unable to imagine how we might possibly have gone wrong*

.....**G.K.Chesterston**

*The minority is sometimes right; the majority always wrong* .....**George Bernard Shaw**



Administration:

- The process or activity of running a business. Organization etc. The people responsible for this, regarded collectively.
- Performance of executive duties.

(Webster dictionary)

**A**dministration. The word carries with it a ring of authority, aloofness; an antiseptic flavour. Starting with word is therefore a poor start. Let us try a different starting point.

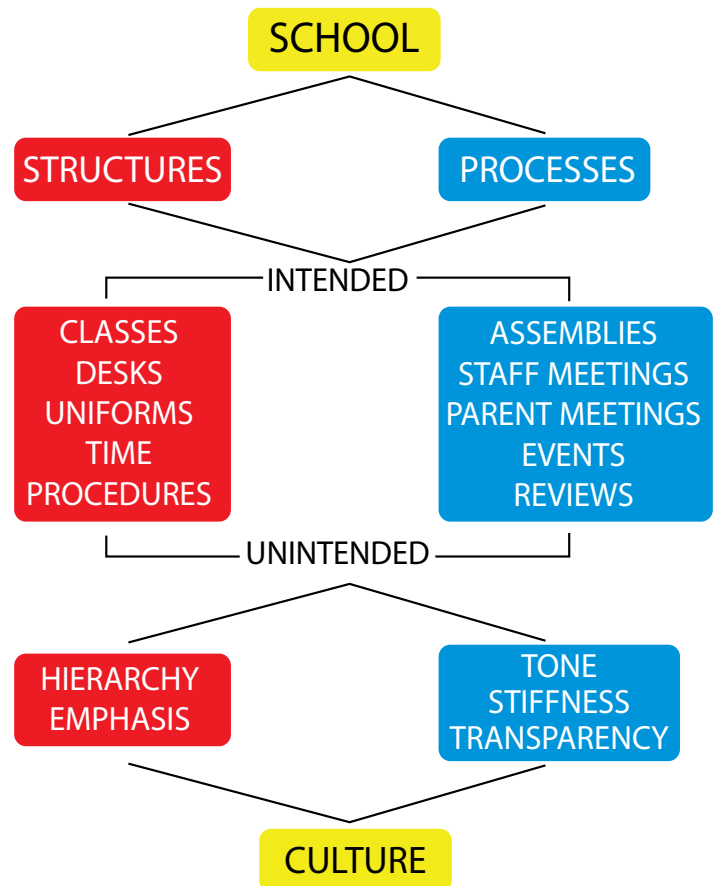
Schools have structures and processes. Some are intended; the product of thinking by the governing body or staff of a school. Others grow out of nowhere – they are perhaps not planned-but they are real and tangible.

It may be possible to say that administration is 'attention to the intended and the unintended' structures and processes. Particularly in schools, thanks to the terms such as 'Headmaster' or 'Principal', the term administration suggests that one person is in 'control'. Nothing could be less true. If administration could also connote 'culture' of a school, the way things are done, then it becomes abundantly clear why it never is in the hands of just one person.

We are now living in times that are seeing tremendous outward change. Cities are being reshaped. Work places are being transformed and mobility is easy. 'Life long learning' as a metaphor and a reality is here. Access to information on the internet, reaching across the globe with email and video conferencing is giving a new meaning to the words 'knowledge' and 'understanding'. Rather than demonstrate erudition we are being asked to show our ability to learn and reorient and collaborate. Rather than move with the security of established practices we are challenged to move away

from old ground without the security that this is necessarily an improvement.

Our times are wrenching human beings from earlier known securities, even as new insecurities surface with painful regularity – terror, war, natural calamities. There is an upheaval happening in society. Tomorrow promises change and reorientation at each step. Flexible working hours, learning anywhere and anytime are two important features that are of immense significance to schools. The structural edifices of classrooms and timetables are under question and being rearranged by these possibilities. Thus no school



management can be blind to these shaping forces of our times.

A culture of consultation is unavoidable. No one person can say that he has the best idea or the best solution. Questions of openness, prejudice, collaboration, shared intentions are unavoidable. In the shared journeys of educating students, clarification of intentions will be needed many times. Patience will be required to meet new views, difficult views and outrageous, exciting views. Our conditioning will be challenged.

New ideas will increase levels of individual discomfort while holding out some promises. There will always be three broad issues -

Institutions would need a culture of support and appreciation for human failings.

All the little decisions, conscious and unconscious make up the fabric of a school, its texture. No school's culture, however well worked, will carry a machine finish. The feel is that of a handwoven fabric since human beings and their decisions are involved. People never function with machine like precision. This is the beauty and this is the problem too. During the unplanned pressures that the teacher feels in a large number of situations and in the planned efforts, a school reveals its soul. It is in these times that people grow aware of the underpinnings of values, the certainties and the fears that guide an institution.

Simultaneously, new ideas would have to be welcomed and implementation dips will need to be endured.

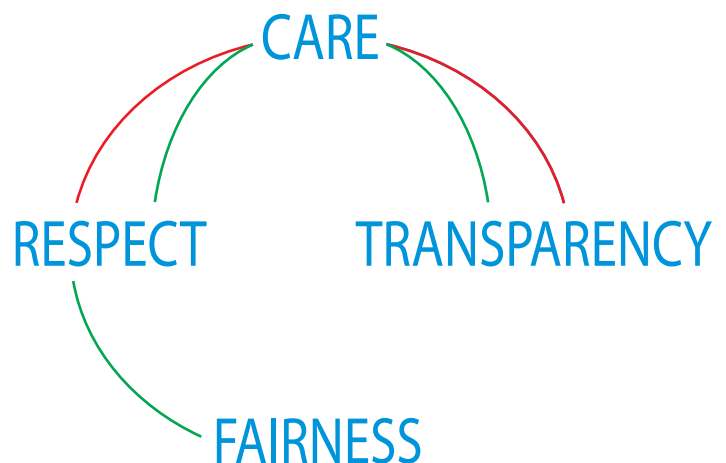
Good cheer and staying away from blame in our communications will be vitally important.

Authority, as traditionally defined, has lost its momentum and efficacy and is recognized today as a sign of backwardness. Following a leader or boss without conviction is a sign of a weak intellect. Questioning, as equals, has gained energy. Just as the World War II gave strength to women's emancipation in a big way, the computer industry has ushered in the age of irreverent questioning in the traditional temples of success, the organization. The successful organizations are not the sweat shops, reeking of exploitation, or cracking the feudal or colonial whips to subjugate their workers; but those that proudly wear transparency and equality as shining

principles of respectful human interaction and transaction. The authoritarian principles are well established and well known. The egalitarian principles are also well established but less known. Schools as crucibles of learning need to be ahead of their times and anticipate the future and strongly embody these principles. Before one moves further we must recognize that **egalitarian functioning still feels strange in most places.** Our individual personal histories and mankind's history makes it difficult to trust it fully. Nevertheless, it is the only way ahead.

In attempting to speak about school administration, the best place to begin may be common sense. It seems obvious that any administration must be constructed on a foundation of **respect, fairness and transparency.** All three may be put under the umbrella of **care.**

It is to be remembered that lack of fairness in an institution weakens the fabric irreversibly. And fairness is to be seen by all, and felt in the air.



The processes of a school are not different from those of other groups/ organizations. All institutions face, more or less, the same or similar situations. The difference is in the way they meet them. Working together is inevitable in shared spaces, such as institutions and organizations. Schools are no exceptions.

*"There must be unstinted co-operation among all the teachers in a school of the right kind. The whole staff should meet often, to talk over the various problems of the school; and when they have agreed upon a certain course of action, there should obviously be no difficulty in carrying out what has been decided. If some decision taken by the majority does not meet with the approval of*

*a particular teacher, it can be discussed again at the next meeting of the faculty.*

*No teacher should be afraid of the headmaster or feel intimidated by the older teachers. Happy agreement is possible only when there is a feeling of absolute equality among all. It is essential that this feeling of equality prevail in the right kind of school, for there can be real co-operation only when the sense of superiority and its opposite are non-existent. If there is mutual trust, any difficulty or misunderstanding will not just be brushed aside, but will be faced, and confidence restored."*

J. Krishnamurti,  
Education and the significance of life."

This one statement, assimilated into an individual's consciousness, and an institution's consciousness, could radically affect the culture. Unfortunately we usually approach this statement with apprehension, trepidation, uncertainty and disbelief. Some corollaries and elaborations of this statement can be stated - most may appear self evident –

When different individuals work together there will be different perceptions and ideas. While these need not become barriers to a healthy working together, most often they do. Institutional movement and capacity to move ahead depends on the strength of processes for handling differing perceptions.

For a participative culture in any institution, it is important that differing views are welcomed and stated. Paradoxically, good decision making requires individuals who can put aside views.

Thinking, discussing, questioning are important attributes of a healthy culture and all must experience this as a fact at all

**Decisions....**

There is no decision or position without some advantages & some disadvantages. Whenever a decision is being made, it is important to remember that we are choosing some disadvantages.

It is greatly helpful at all levels to ask before finally making a decision, if this is a good idea, or an idea whose time has come.

levels. Without watchfulness, barriers develop.

Close and affiliative behavior, particularly among decision makers, while it may yield short term results, weakens the institutional fabric in the long run. All too often there are barriers in institutions - some are included, others excluded. Some are 'in' and others 'not in'.

Encouragement in a culture is usually sustained through rewards and punishments. Listening carefully to everyone seriously and respectfully is the only real alternative.

Some impersonal and widely distributed norms and principles help spread the intended culture. Some articulation is unavoidable and can be avoided only at risk to institutional health. However, the danger of articulation is that words become clichés, in the absence of sustaining processes. And empty clichés make hollow institutions.

While liking the notions of plurality and diversity most institutions, at the core, are extremely rigid and hierarchic. This manifests itself in how decision making is carried out.

Growing institutions may need to pick up or discover different 'tools' from time to time. Institutions often find themselves embroiled in the question 'Is the adoption of new tools a 'betrayal' of institutional History?'

Without adequate processes for 'gracing' one's history it is difficult to 'wholesomely' move ahead.

Leadership.

- Intelligently, skilfully, wholesomely navigating that which is given,
- Finding and taking the next step.

If an institution does not concern itself with developing leadership, it begins to stagnate or lose distinctness. It is likely to be swamped by the 'dominant' culture of the time. Distinctness, in a culture, is always under assault from the dominant Culture. And the key in processes of sustenance, regeneration and handing over. **Leadership building is actually an effort at sustaining a valuable culture, not merely survival into the future.**

Some new ideas gain currency in times such as now, rapid change is a vital need for these times.

In 1995, Asha, a young, new colleague, was most alarmed at a certain decision that was being taken. After 3 rounds of meetings, the school staff had decided that it would conduct a series of meetings with the senior-most students of the school. She voiced her objections saying, "I think things are quite ok and there is no reason for such a series of meetings." The principal could not move ahead without either dismissing her view – which would also imply that "you are new, young and your view is therefore uninformed" or "while we can listen to you we cannot take you seriously." This was an institutional crisis.

My colleagues and I looked hard at the fundamentals. We told Asha, "Thank you for speaking your mind. This is valuable to us as it means that there is space for people to actually voice what they feel. It may be uncomfortable for us to hear this but that is not your problem. Second, please hold your reservations they are valuable. No one is going to try and convince you to change your mind. Third, how shall we move ahead? We have been holding discussions about holding a series of meetings with senior students. You have an objection and think it is a bad idea.

Can we consider holding one meeting and then reviewing the decision? Surely others would pick up your misgivings if they are evident." Asha agreed and we were together in the decision. After the first meeting she said, "All my misgivings have vanished. Let us go ahead."

Is it possible for colleagues to say to each other the following:

- a. I will not try to convince you.
- b. Let us listen to each other carefully.
- c. As we discuss and listen, we can come to what is the right thing to do together.

Further I ask, is it possible for teachers to say the same to students?

How dissent is located in an institution is crucial. Space for dissent is vital and cannot be denied. The new technologies, particularly the internet, are making traditional intolerance for the other view, almost impossible. If dissent is not permitted or discouraged, it will find expression through other mediums, and the internet can reach any corner of the world. Each organization and institution experiences some struggles in this area. The culture of an organization, its

A senior colleague Kamala was once asked, as part of an in-house survey, if she had space to voice her opinions at school & if her views counted or were taken into account. She replied, "I have always been able to voice my views. When a decision is taken and it is against my view, I still feel I have contributed to the decision."

humanness, its strength and character, are most defined, by the space and processes for engaging with dissent in its fold. Agreement, on all but the most trivial matters, is not easily found. Recognition of this fact and the manner in which colleagues, friends, teachers and students navigate this terrain is critical. Krishnamurti's teachings clearly move away from 'convincing' another, 'coercion' or use of 'authority'. The space defined by him 'collaboration, not around an idea' is truly a transformational challenge, not just for the individual but for the institution as well.

Organizations need to evolve into an understanding of some crucial points. Krishnamurti indicates that:

Views are not important, fact is. Decisions are made, not through authority, but 'thinking together' and there is a collaboration, that is not around an idea. It may interesting to ask if such a position is tenable in the 'day to day' running of a school or any organization. The 'day to day' metaphor assumes that there is an urgency in the matters to be decided, a hurry, a 'cannot wait'. Is this so?

Decisions are made at all levels. If something resembles what was done earlier, we don't call it a 'decision'. However it is one – it is the decision to 'continue' as before.

Most decisions are made through the need for fairness and consistency. In fact most institutional problems relate to not doing in letter and spirit what was done yesterday. Doing the same thing as yesterday, mechanically. Not recognizing the need for a fresh approach.

A fair and true invitation to express followed by a careful hearing is a vital, and yet often elusive, feature of human communication. It is not surprising that the shared space of institutions and organizations most vitally lives these questions.

The premise defines all else. The orchestra needs a conductor and the military a commander. Even in groups that

practise democracy it seems extremely difficult to move away from 'dominant' or 'overriding' influences. Can schools and modern institutions conceive of vibrant alternatives? Can the

working space in institutions, schools carry a deeper quality of intelligence, and not a tussle for power and influence, obvious or subtle?

---

**G.Gautama** worked as Principal, The School KFI (1991-2009) and guided important educational, administrative and institutional transitions. Now as Director of The Chennai Education Centre KFI, he is responsible for The School, an Outreach program that has contributed significantly to the State Schools in Tamilnadu and Pathashaala, a new KFI residential school. He may be contacted at [gautama2004@gmail.com](mailto:gautama2004@gmail.com).

### Editor's Note:

This article was originally published in Volume 10 of The Journal of Krishnamurti Schools. The Editor thanks the KFI for permission to reprint the same.



“Be the change you want to see in this world”

– Mahatma Gandhi

School leadership is one of most discussed issues in education today. No debate on educational policy and practice is complete without a reference, good or bad, to the critical role leaders play in school education. I have read many compelling case studies written on leaders in both the government and private sectors who have overcome a number of systemic hurdles and transformed their school. Whether it is the story of Achla Kukreti who transformed the under-resourced New Delhi Municipal Corporation schools, or that of Abha Adams who created the famed Shri Ram school in more privileged settings in that city or for that matter the much-watched TED story of Babar Ali, the 16-year old boy from Murshidabad in West Bengal who became the country’s youngest headmaster; are all deeply inspiring tales. I also come across shocking stories of the poor

*The first case I wish to make is that our schools need Instructional Leaders; leaders who hold themselves accountable for student learning and are directly engaged in improving the teaching-learning process and are not just administrative managers.*

leadership practices that threaten our schools, captured in the DISE 2006-07 data that reveals that more than half of the total elementary schools in India are yet to be provided with a regular headmaster, or stories in the media about the misuse of power by school heads in both private and government schools.

While stories and case studies of individual inspiring leaders are useful, I would like to use this opportunity to paint a picture of what effective school leadership may look like in practice, how best to act on it in the everyday context of schooling and what systemic support is needed to sustain it at scale. My understanding has been primarily shaped

by the on-the-ground action research that my organization iDiscover Education has conducted while improving the quality of over five hundred mainstream independent schools across the country,

where we have had the opportunity to coach hundreds of school leaders in implementing an integrated curriculum, training and assessment. Global research on school leadership, although mostly done in the context of countries other than India, is beginning to converge as well on similar lines.

**The first case I wish to make is that our schools need Instructional Leaders; leaders who hold themselves accountable for student learning and are directly engaged in improving the teaching-learning process and are not just administrative managers.**

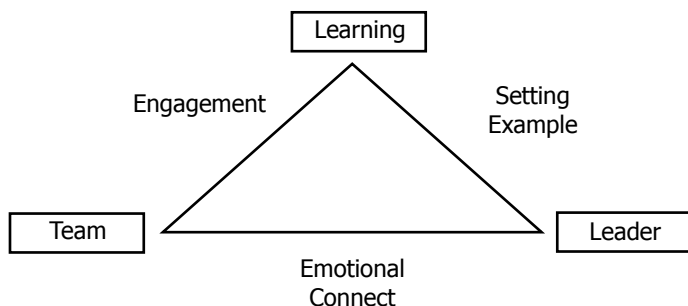
Harvard professor Richard Elmore writes: “The purpose of leadership is the improvement of instructional practice and performance... This is a deliberately de-romanticized, focused and instrumental definition.” Studies done by ASCD in America shows that “School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on learning. Top performing headmasters can make a 20 percentage point difference in student learning.”

Our on-the-ground experience in India validates these conclusions. The most significant improvements in our partner schools were achieved where the leaders invested uncommon attention to learning and teaching. What is perhaps more instructive is that many of these leaders are not by any means charismatic individuals or education experts. Their schools, located in small towns all over the map from Ajmer to Tirunelveli, are also not exempt from the constraints of teacher quality, infrastructural constraints, parental apathy and administrative problems. What sets them apart is that they put relentless focus on improving learning, to the exclusion of administrative trivia. They invested time outside the office and in the classroom, kept in touch with what students actually learnt, watched teachers inside the classroom, gave feedback and drove small changes in the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of teaching.



**The second suggestion I have is to translate the theoretical definition of instructional leadership into a practical 'how-to' action plan for the school leader to implement at school.** To that end, an actionable model that we have developed may provide a useful construct. Leadership is most needed when a change in the environment creates coping or adaptive challenges. The adaptive challenge for schools is how to demonstrate visible learning for every child in the classroom while coping with the constraints of differences in children's learning, variances in teacher quality and lack of quality instructional resources. There is no easy answer to this question. So the first priority of the school leader would be to make quality learning and teaching the single point agenda as to why her role exists in the school and to drive a disproportionate amount of time, energy and resources towards this end. Consequently, moving administrative gears, and dealing with bureaucracy and management may assume secondary importance.

Having set learning as her primary agenda what actions does the leader undertake? We conceptualize leadership as an act, or a verb. The school leader's role then is to act in a way in which she sets a personal **example** and creates a strong **emotional** bond of trust with her team in order to **engage** in the work of better learning. We have named this the '3E Model of Leadership.' It is an integrated conceptual framework that draws on the work of several researchers, notably educator David Hawkins, leadership experts Ronald Heifetz and Warren Bennis and organizational learning theorist Noel Tichy and is validated through our leadership work with over 10,000 leaders across education and organizational domains. While all of us may have varying quality of innate talent for leadership, we have seen that these practices can be learnt.



We recommend three practices ahead of others that can be practiced irrespective of school context.

- Set a personal Example of being a role model teacher and learner.** There is no better way to do this than to be inside the classroom, teaching alongside teachers and learning alongside students. Mrs. Gunmeet Bindra, the principal of the Vidya Devi Jindal School, who worked with us to transform her 23-year-old institution said – “I would sit with my teachers and work with their lesson plans. Once a teacher was struggling with the resources she had to use. I told her, “Let’s go into the classroom and let me be your teaching assistant for a day”. Every week from then on, I would take two substitution periods and teach the classes myself. This has had such a tremendous impact on teaching-learning in the classroom.” Demonstrating effective teaching, observing and giving feedback to teachers inside the classroom, looking at children's work and most importantly being curious about learning – is the kind of example that our school leaders can set for others to follow.

- Build Emotional resonance with their teacher and student community through empathy and appreciation.** Learning, and consequently teaching, happens best in an emotionally secure yet intellectually challenging environment. School leaders need to build a climate of trust and collaboration in their team. In building school cultures fostering learning, we have seen that leaders who institutionalize practices like giving specific appreciation, engaging in circle time conversations and soliciting feedback have been instrumental in building emotional resonance in their teams.

- Keeping the teaching community engaged in the learning process by giving hope and optimism.** The act of learning is an act of engagement with a difficult task. Children learn by repeatedly trying, failing and trying again. So do teachers. Teaching, especially for real learning and not for rote, requires teachers to stay engaged with their children, the subject-matter and their own their own struggles of learning and unlearning; it is an inherently difficult task. Leaders need to provide a holding environment in which teachers feel the freedom to try alternatives to the norm and the constant reinforcement not to give up until they see visible improvement in children. This will also require re-constructing the role of teachers where they start taking personal responsibility for their own professional

development and are rewarded for making visible progress towards their goals.

**My third and final recommendation is to bring in structural changes in classroom process, school organization and principal development so that instructional leadership practices can be effectively scaled beyond individual 'star practitioners'.** While we have seen that effective school leadership is a necessary condition to school improvement, it is not sufficient. The available instructional process inside the classroom is weak even in the best of our schools – limited to a two-step 'tell and listen' model. What are also missing are tools and structures that can scaffold teachers at the last-mile inside the classroom. We have seen that good leadership practices can sustain, especially in under-resourced schools, when we create detailed teaching processes and practical tools that support curriculum and assessment.

We have also seen that schools that bifurcate administration and academic responsibilities tend to do better on both. In most of the schools we have worked with, we have successfully created an instructional leader cadre, drawn from senior teachers and academic coordinators who lead

instructional design and improvement while principals continue with their administrative responsibilities.

Finally, we have realized that one-off training, especially of the 'workshop' variety, has limited impact in preparing leaders and teachers. What our country needs is rigorous selection process to recruit the best candidates, a practicum-based preparatory college for aspiring principals, and an on-the-job coaching process that builds their skills inside the schooling system. We can look to Singapore, United States and many other countries that are pursuing this more deliberate route to preparing their school leaders.

India has one million schools and we need one million leaders. What we really need is for these leaders to invest their time and energy inside the classroom, leading by example, building an emotional connect and creating deep engagement for learning. For them to succeed we need to equip them with well-researched instructional tools, free them of administrative workload and reinforce their skills with ongoing learning. It will certainly be a large investment for our country, but will be well worth it, yielding a dramatic improvement in learning and teaching quality.

### References:

1. Improving Government Schools What has been tried and what works - Mandira Kumar & Padma M. Sarangpani (Editors), 2005
2. Proceedings of the iDiscoveri "School of Tomorrow" Conference – Dec 07, 2010 New Delhi
3. "iDiscoveri 3E Model of Leadership" – Ashish Rajpal, Renu Rajpal and Anustup Nayak
4. Building a New Structure For School Leadership - Richard F. Elmore, Professor, Graduate School of Education Harvard University and Senior Research Fellow, Consortium for Policy Research in Education, WINTER2000 THE ALBERT SHANKER INSTITUTE
5. The Indian Public School System - Time for a Quality Revolution, ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth

---

**Anustup Nayak** is a Partner at iDiscoveri Education, a leading social enterprise with a mission to renew school education, where he leads its corporate communications function. Anustup left a successful corporate career in the United States to follow his interest in education and social entrepreneurship. At iDiscoveri Anustup has held a range of roles in its advocacy and business development, teacher and leadership education, research and consulting practices. Anustup's interests lie in the areas of social enterprise, school reform and organizational leadership development. Anustup holds a Masters degree in Education from Harvard University and in Public Policy from Georgia Tech. He may be contacted at [anustup@idiscoveri.com](mailto:anustup@idiscoveri.com).





An intrinsically motivated and skilled Head teacher could work as a “mini-CRC” (Cluster Resource Coordinator) of her own school. She could organize a fun and professional learning environment for all staff of the school through interestingly organized academic discussions at staff meetings, develop teacher capacities through cross observation of classes, and peer feedback on teaching style and lesson plans and manage the personal development plans of teachers in line with an overall school development plan. However, instead the head teacher is reduced to an administrator – for data to be sent to “superiors”, for staff allocation to classes, for mid day meal and construction works and of course the all important census, polio and other village surveys.

In order to perform this “mini CRC” role, the Head teacher needs two things – intrinsic motivation and skills as a leader. Currently the senior most teacher in a school is automatically (and often reluctantly) “promoted” to the head teacher role without checking for motivation or leadership skills. If instead we selected the intrinsically motivated teacher and promoted her to be the Head teacher after a systematic leadership training program to help her manage staff motivations and professional development maybe we would suddenly have hundreds of thousands of “mini CRCs” in every school in the country. Kaivalya Education Foundation runs an experiment to build leadership in existing Head teachers in 100 schools in each of Jhunjhunu (Rajasthan), Ahmedbad and Mumbai through a 3 year part-time inservice programme that involves 16 days of workshops and 16 days of on-site coaching per annum.

It is possible to develop the intrinsic motivation and leadership skill in almost any person. As long as we start with the assumption that “Every human being is inherently good, wants to do good and be respected and will rise to her level of performance if provided the right environment and support”. Having said that, is it possible to systematically help create motivated a Head teacher in every school? Our experience in this regard is largely positive and hence our answer to the question is a big “YES”.

Intrinsic motivation can be created by helping discover “meaning” in one’s role, “pride” in one’s co-workers, the joy of expanding oneself through continuous “learning” and

“fun” in the daily interactions with children. Sadly each of these has been gradually corroded over time and it is thus hardly surprising that Head teachers work like it is a dull, boring job rather than being on the most exciting “nation building” activity that they were conferred with. Our program tries to systematically re-create meaning, pride, learning and fun.

### Re-discovering “Meaning” In One’s Role

*“What would you like your community, co-workers and ex-students to say about you if they were to give a speech on your 80th birthday?” “What are they likely to say about you based on how you currently act and behave with them?”*

*“Who is a teacher that you remember from your childhood and why?” “Will your children remember you as fondly?”*

Teaching is one of the most meaningful professions in the world. Every day you get an opportunity to mould a child’s character, help her discover herself and the world around. It is our opportunity to be a social reformer, big brother, mentor and child all rolled into one. The joy of a student when she comes back after 20 years ago to say “Thank you Madam/Sir” is difficult to express. It is not about just about earning a decent income – it is about being helpful and of use beyond that. Sadly, most government teachers have not experienced this joy.

By conducting reflection sessions, life mapping sessions, sharing sessions and deep enquiries we help teachers question why they are doing what they are doing. We help them see the meaning in their role and thus create an ‘active’ practitioner – rather than a dull lifeless administrator.

A teacher from a small village school in Rajasthan said after a year in our program and I quote “In bachon ne mujhe jeena sikhaya. Jeevan kya hai yeh sikhaya – bas hason, khelo...” (These children taught me what life is. They taught me the meaning of life – it’s simple, just laugh, play...”

### Re-building Pride In One’s Co-workers

Sport has an amazing ability to build teams. We play “Ultimate Frisbee” with teachers and Head teachers to help build their ability to work together to achieve an objective as

a team. It's a very simple "no contact" sport which involves two teams of 5 each working to try and get a Frisbee beyond the other team's goal line. We chose it because it is "no contact" and thus men and women can play together, it requires limited material (only Rs 50 frisbee) and is "self refereeing" (disputes have to be resolved through dialogue and without a third party involved).

It's amazing what doing just one joint project together successfully as a team can do to the motivation of a group of teachers working together in a school. If they start off believing that they cannot do it, but slowly learn each day and improve and finally are successful, it suddenly changes their own self image as a "Team". In most schools there is limited recognition of what one can learn from ones co-workers; teachers feel alone in their classrooms, scared to share their failings in the classrooms for fear of being perceived as incompetent. Sport creates a non threatening environment to practice learning to respect each other, learning to support and share skills with each other and achieve something together as a team.

*"Why am I not willing to pass to Ms X while I am constantly passing to Ms Y? Is it because I don't think she can play well and am keener on winning than participation of all my team mates? How does that make Ms Y feel? Is Ms Y not good at anything or can she be given a key role? What is my role as a leader of a team? How did I feel when everyone participated even though we did not win? What did I learn from my teammates?"*

*It is not that they are not interested in learning, but that we have not been able to get them to experience the joy of learning. If we respect them as people, stir them with interesting short reading materials, organize facilitated dialogues around topics of relevance and help them reflect on their own practice, it becomes possible to create an enthusiastic learner.*

A Head teacher who by his own admission had lost faith 10 years ago in his teachers' commitment and thus stopped functioning in his school, suddenly found a new tool to re-engage with them and is now running a much more energetic learning environment.

### **Experiencing The Joy Of Expanding Oneself Through Continuous Learning**

What is the 'National Curriculum Framework?' What were the choices that the writers had to make when drafting it? What were the debates around key issues and how do they link to the values enshrined in the constitution? Why do we teach mathematics? What is the philosophy of teaching mathematics?

When engaging in dialogue and debates around interesting questions such as these, Head teachers are able to broaden their horizon of thoughts and this helps them re-engage with their work with renewed gusto and awareness. New questions arise rather than the mechanical repetition of "chalk and talk" that they have themselves got bored of. They recognize that there is so much more to 'learn' and 'experience' everyday, discuss with peers and more experienced views. They recognize that they actually have a view based on their own practice and feel proud, motivated, and energized to learn more.

It is not that they are not interested in learning, but that we have not been able to get them to experience the joy of learning. If we respect them as people, stir them with interesting short reading materials, organize facilitated dialogues around topics of relevance and help them reflect on their own practice, it becomes possible to create an enthusiastic learner.

I never imagined I could sit with a bunch of government school teachers debating after workshop hours late into the evening whether grouping of children in activity based classrooms should be homogenous or mixed and the sociological implications of our choice!!! But I did. And I dare say that they enjoyed it even more than I did.

### **Having Fun At Work – Everyday!**

When was the last time you danced? Sang really loudly like no one was watching? Laughed with children? Painted something that you yourself were amazed at? Wrote a poem that expressed how you really felt?

Art creates new emotions and connects us to a new and

gentler self. But few Head teachers have used this medium after they passed out of school. They have forgotten that they have a right to express themselves; that creating and expressing is joy by itself. Rekindling this artistic sense helps in reducing the violence within, helps in connecting to deep emotions that were buried and helps in redrafting the self image as a creator rather than consumer.

A Head teacher perceived by all his peers as patriarchal, autocratic and self involved wrote and shared a poem about love. At the end of it he had tears himself and everyone around him was aghast at what emotions he actually felt - these were very different from those of a union leader all these years. He is a much more gentle and fun loving person these days, respected by his peers for very different reasons.

### Building Leadership Skills

One of the core functions of a head teacher is “Instructional Leadership” – i.e. the ability to coach and develop her teachers. For this she needs to learn to be an empathetic listener, build connections with her staff, help them articulate their problems, support them to outline courses of action, help choose the best course of action, try it and then reflect on what was achieved or not before repeating the entire cycle again. Unfortunately, as simple as these sound, it is the most difficult job and instead most teachers lapse into the more trained behavior of not empathizing, connecting, listening or problem solving but doling out “motherhood” advice that is not implementable or relevant in the circumstances.

Head teachers can be taught how to support and coach their team of teachers. This does not require them to know more on every subject and on every topic than the person being

coached. This requires them to learn listening and coaching skills. Since they have never experienced a coaching environment it requires role modeling by facilitators, self assessment questionnaires and exercises, tool kits and reading materials, role plays and feedback mechanisms from peers and experienced instructors.

“Pehle mein sochtha tha ki aadmi ko nahi badla ja sakthha hai. Abhi mujhe patha chala ki aadmi ko badalne ke liye bhi bahuth saree techniquiyan hain and unko use karke kissi se bhi kaam karvaya ja sakthha hai” A government school Head teacher (First I used to think that a person’s behavior cannot be changed. Now I have learnt that in order to change behavior there are many techniques and using those techniques I can get work done by others). Without providing these basic tools to our Head teachers we are doing them a dis-service.

### Conclusion

Research has proven time and again that an intrinsically motivated Head teacher can dramatically improve the functioning of a school. For all of us who went to private schools in India, we all know a Father ‘Bosco’, who because of his commitment, compassion and energy, knew every child in the school, worked really hard for them to reach their potential and set a tone for all his staff. Now the question is whether we can systematically create such Head teachers through a secular professional development process.

Can we run leadership training programs for helping develop all our Head teachers into intrinsically motivated “mini CRCs”? With all due respect to Aamir Khan’s character in the movie 3 idiots who runs a vibrant school for children, can we create 700,000 idiots – one in each government school in India?

---

**Aditya Natraj** is the Founder Director of the Kaivalya Education Foundation (KEF), focused on leadership development for social change. KEF runs two programs – the “School Leadership Program” that trains government school principals to turnaround their failing schools and the “Gandhi Fellowship” that trains youth in leading grassroot social change. Aditya has worked for 8 years in business and 8 years in grassroot education development. Aditya has an MA in Economics and an MBA from INSEAD.



Priya Iyer

School education in India is in the process of transformation. There are efforts to tackle the most glaring problems of our national system of education: by bringing in renewed approaches such as empowering teachers not only in teaching but also in administrative decision making, providing students with opportunities to engage in self directed and reflective activities; and by establishing connections between school and society.

Some private bodies across India have led the way in this transformation; and here is a case specific example - NIRMAN (a Varanasi based organization) whose ideas have arisen from analyzing existing realities with the tools of research in educational practice.

What does school leadership in such small, private innovative schools mean in the Indian context? What are the challenges and realities in such schools? This paper attempts to discuss these thoughts by focusing on four aspects of the school: its guardians, teachers, society and the changing contexts. While doing so, I hope to show that successful educational practice consists of flexible and imaginative movement between two poles: (i) the ideals of how children should learn, as exemplified in the best philosophies; and (ii) the reality of teachers' limits, guardians' response, and state-governed requirements.

### The School And Its Guardians:

I start my observation with middle school children from an innovative school in a village in UP. The students were studying aspects of environmental challenges and reflecting on issues of their own village. They had been discussing about how their parents as farmers were unaware of the harm caused by the use of chemicals, how they would find polythene while tilling land, and how the sand around the river Ganga was sold illegally by some villagers posing threat of landslides and soil erosion. These were the voices of children who had lived with these situations and who were concerned that villagers ought to be aware of them.

While discussing solutions, they came up with an idea of highlighting these problems by painting pictures on walls and directly conveying the message in their neighborhoods.

The next day the enthusiastic children set off for their task and soon caught the attention of people around, some of

whom came forward for a few brush strokes, others of whom were happy that their home walls were chosen for the painting. This activity went on for about a week.



One bright sunny afternoon a group of women (school parents) remarked, "So, there is no study going on, what will these pictures yield? Will drawing, playing and having fun the whole day give them intellect? (buddhi aa jaye gi?)"

The parents were worried that their children should go to school regularly and engage in 'intellectual work'; they could not relate themselves with the school's academic philosophy.

“

*While middle class parents, no doubt, opt for schools where there is a favorable child-friendly environment, they still have not lost their faith in an authoritarian educational culture. They opt for the newer, emerging models of schools for their children in the beginning, but do not want to take a 'risk' of continuing to keep their children in such schools in later years.*

”

Learning from such incidents the school encouraged the parents to visit classrooms, watch children engage in different tasks and talk to teachers freely. It also organized fairs on topics such as 'imagination' where a wide range of approaches (arts, crafts, theatre, and music) were used to disseminate ideas on school practice in ways that all parents could relate to.

Such parental concern leads us to re-visit aspects of educational decisions in schools; to reflect on the voice, needs and aspirations of each parent and assure them that schooling will make their children grow up as competent

adults and with equal preference and attitude for different kinds of work.

How much to teach and what to teach has often been a great point of debate. The national curriculum framework has given direction to this issue; some state and central text books have also specified the range of curriculum. NIRMAN has demonstrated that academic programs that associate children's learning with the world around them are effective in maintaining a continuation of life and work, and thereby bring meaning to learning.

But for most parents, a formal teaching environment instead of an active engagement with everyday processes seems to be the only desirable choice. This poses a challenge to the school in respect to approaches. Of course, parents' level of identification with (and expectations from) schools varies across social and economic backgrounds. But by and large, the inflated achievement standards and the increased curriculum load today have made parents look at their child's future with apprehension.

While middle class parents, no doubt, opt for schools where there is a favorable child-friendly environment, they still have not lost their faith in an authoritarian educational culture. They opt for the newer, emerging models of schools for their children in the beginning, but do not want to take a 'risk' of continuing to keep their children in such schools in later years.

The demand of education from the community of parents both in the rural as well as urban backgrounds makes us

*While new, innovative schools do have a thorough educational agenda, their leadership task is not limited to children alone but goes further into initiating a parallel program for the parents. The challenges range from raising awareness about emerging trends in teaching and learning, to sharing issues on food, health and gender.*

realize that all that is desired is a formal system with written documentation of children's work. Perhaps this feeling stems from their faith in the utility and intrinsic value that they associate with conventional, authoritarian schooling, being the only model of schooling they know.

While new, innovative schools do have a thorough educational agenda, their leadership task is not limited to children alone but goes further into initiating a parallel program for the parents. The challenges range from raising awareness about emerging trends in teaching and learning, to sharing issues on food, health and gender. It also involves measures like planning certain school activities with parents and empowering them in playing an active role in their children's schooling.

### **The School And Its Teachers:**

I now move towards teachers with one specific instance in an interview room. A prospective teacher introduces herself by saying, "I am a B.Ed. and have applied for the post of 'lady teacher'. I can teach all subjects in lower classes and up to class V, I can teach Math and Science. After that I can teach English, 'Social' and Hindi. I have done Sanskrit up to class V; I can teach this also if there is a vacancy. I don't know 'Computer' but I have experience of teaching GK and Moral Science".

At one level such an answer delights a school leader as having met a multi-talented trained professional. But subsequent communication shows a huge gap between the stated list and its application in teaching-learning process. This situation reflects the social ethos that determines the 'choice' of teaching as a career option. It shows the constraints of schools in selection of candidates and the responsibility for continuous in-service programs.

Do schools give in-service training? This was a question that has been asked of me, time and again.

Schools have a huge responsibility of bridging the links between theory and practice. Realizing this need NIRMAN initiates in-service program for its teachers that involves learning to reflect, to plan spaces for varied experiences, to understand children's literature and curricular content, and, last but not the least to build perspectives on social issues.

Leadership in such schools adopts a humane approach towards newly-appointed teachers. It believes in building on

teachers' strengths and utilization of their knowledge of native categories into teaching and learning. It provides teachers the opportunity to construct and de-institutionalize the curriculum so as to match it with children's experiences.

No doubt, this approach will empower teachers in the long run, but schools have a huge challenge of ensuring that this journey of transformation of teachers does not have ethical repercussions on children. Children need competent adults who can work with them for their immediate needs. They need teachers who are not themselves learning the basics of each subject along with them, but who can challenge them in various ways.

This in no way means reinforcing the traditional image of a teacher as the know-all and never a learner; herself. Instead, this emphasizes the need to work on the real challenge of countering this stereotype with a teacher who must have a good grounding of fundamentals, but be ever open to learning. But, even in a supportive professional environment, teachers find it hard to de-construct their own learning and disposition and therefore tend to look for careers that do not involve thinking and self-gear tasks.

Despite all these circumstances such schools do not shrink from their responsibility towards parents and teachers. On the contrary, they add on their commitment to other dimensions.

### **The School And Its Larger Society:**

After a sports day program a parent of a middle class background remarked, "Children of poor families were remarkable in the races. Even with uniforms you can make it out...just see the smiles on their faces when they receive a prize". She said further, "But don't you think there are now more poor children in the school?"

Another parent followed, "Earlier my child did not even know the word 'paagal' but now he is using all the 'gaali' that he has learnt in the bus. I think there should be a teacher in the vehicle to ensure that innocent children do not get influenced by others".

Such situations led NIRMAN to initiate 'neighborhood meetings' where people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds shared their worries and also reflected on their responsibilities in dealing with such matters. These also facilitated personal acquaintance and social bonds among

people.

Schools that adhere to our constitutional mandate should provide equal opportunities to all children regardless of their social economic background. But there are numerous challenges in integrating 'fee-paying' and 'non fee paying' students in a contemporary India that is still struggling between a modern and a traditional identity.

It is not easy for parents and to some extent teachers to accept a school that is open to the marginalized. Laws alone have never been successful in changing the situation or the thought process. And, while schools need to focus on the commitment to improve quality, they cannot visualize a separation of the social from the cognitive or emotional from the physical. The question is thus one of the development of our children and the future of our society, regardless of the various challenges that come along the way.

Indeed, it is a larger question of connection with humanity.

### **The School And Its Changing Context:**

I finally turn to the issue that a school faces at the systemic level.

Recent developments in educational policy show a trend towards opening up India's educational sector to foreign investment. The idea is to empower private bodies with self regulatory mechanisms to bring quality while sharing the responsibility of government in education. While this issue has been a welcome move in some quarters and much is still debated, we are more concerned about schools that want to bring about a transformation.

Investment and sustenance have been critical to schools that work to execute a vision. Inadequate funds prevent the best talent pool of our youth from staying in such challenging and creative jobs. These schools tend to become platforms of capacity building for budding professionals who opt for more viable options after their 'internship' with the school is over.

A single step by the government, quite similar to the liberalizing policy in higher education, can do a lot to support such schools. Precisely, if they are granted a 'board affiliation' this would enable parents and teachers to visualize a secured future of children and of their jobs, respectively, and above all would provide the schools strength to pursue their goals with more rigor. While this could well not prevent teachers

from switching to more lucrative jobs if the opportunity arises, it could certainly hold a lot of people who wish to seriously commit themselves to a life time in education.

Today, education has a huge business potential and an affiliation with a national board makes most schools flourish with large numbers of students. But ironically, affiliation does not come easily to institutions that work with a strong philosophy and vision. Such schools face a huge setback due to rigid bureaucratic norms. Deprived of accredited status, they cannot indulge in economies of scale and are labeled as 'islands of excellence'.

A question that emerges is - can such creative endeavors truly be scaled? Or can even the small get its due share of appreciation and support as does the big?

### Conclusion:

What keeps such organizations going despite all the problems? Perhaps, with each challenge, come hopes for success and the desire to overcome hurdles that arise from people, resources, state policies and issues that have confronted our society for ages.

Children give immense confidence to such schools. Their enjoyment and participation in every process of learning gives glimpses of their later commitment to the society as adults.

The strength also comes from teachers who find pleasure in sharing a common space of learning with the school organization and the community; who realize the necessity of growing up as skilled professionals and paving the way - not only for their own continued growth but also for social

change of the wider community.

A second silver lining is the aspect of autonomy. These schools allow a unique kind of partnership between the management and the community where the boundaries between them are transparent. Visioning and execution in such schools is a shared enterprise and thus, leadership is pluralistic in nature. This shared belief and understanding evolves with an awareness of ongoing needs and the desire to initiate and address issues.

Leadership in such schools stems from a vision which does not come as 'awe' for people who keep connecting to it in various ways. It is reflected in each little thing that happens in and around the school such as an action of the bus driver who upon reading the morning newspaper of a possible 'bandh' in the city takes the initiative of telephoning a core group of parents and acting on quick decisions. It is also reflected in initiatives of civil society groups who collaborate with the school on crucial issues such as environmental pollution or inter- religious faith and understanding.

The realization of the vision also follows a natural course of action; it is not forced but is an integral part of its people, their personal initiatives, self direction and motivation. Autonomy provides such schools a choice not to replicate strategies of existing educational structures, but to develop a unique framework that blends with situation-specific demands, with continuous introspection and encompassing objectives as envisioned in our constitution.

Where there is such an underlying inner force, collaborative effort and continuous orientation towards change, there is transformation and there is... EDUCATION

**Priya Iyer** is a member of the Azim Premji Foundation Schools team, Bangalore. A teacher for over 17 years, prior to her current role, she worked at NIRMAN a not-for-profit organization in Varanasi where she was the Head of its innovative school 'Vidyashram'. Apart from running the school, Priya thoroughly enjoys teaching children, creating projects in arts and engaging in community programs. She may be contacted at [priya@azimpremjifoundation.org](mailto:priya@azimpremjifoundation.org).



**D**uring my visits to elementary schools across Karnataka, in my various capacities, I used to ask school children quite a standard question: 'What would you like to become, when you grow up?' The children would give me various types of answers – doctor, engineer, pilot, etc. But in cases, where the children said that they would like to become a teacher, it would come as a pleasant surprise to me. It told me many things about the school itself –

- A. Invariably it turned out that in such cases, the students were quite impressed with their teachers,
- B. Their school had a dedicated team of teachers,
- C. A good leadership was provided by the Head Teacher.
- D. Hence, one could conclude that the teachers and the Head Teacher had proved to be the 'role models' for the children to emulate.

This required a certain amount of dedication on the part of the Head Teacher, in order to provide effective leadership in the school and motivate her colleagues to perform to certain standards set by her. But such cases were also few and far between.

The quality of education provided by a school is also directly related to the role of the Head Teacher in providing effective leadership in the school. In fact, a survey conducted by Azim Premji Foundation in Learning Guarantee Program Schools of north-east Karnataka, showed that the presence/absence of the Head Teacher in the school made a significant difference to the quality of learning in the school.

Due to the states' efforts at Universal Elementary Education (UEE) over the years, many children who are entering government schools today are first generation learners from economically weaker sections, from urban slums, belonging to migrant populations, etc. In short, children of those communities who had no access to education previously are accessing government schools today. Are our schools, teachers and head teachers equipped to handle such children effectively and provide quality education to them?

In this context, let us discuss the role of the head teacher in providing effective leadership to the school and the limitations under which she has to play that role.

### Areas Where a Head Teacher can Make a Real Impact

The Head Teacher can effectively provide a leadership role in several areas in the school:

- 1. Administration:** She prepares the Institutional Plan, Annual Academic Plan, and School Time Table with the help of other teachers of the school and implements the same efficiently.
- 2. Academic supervision and motivating of the teachers:** She also acts as an internal academic supervisor of the academic work of all the teachers of the school. She has to supervise the 'Annual Programme of work' and 'Weekly Lesson Plans' prepared by all the teachers of the school. She also has to effectively supervise classroom teaching of all the teachers and provide the much needed professional and resource support. Another important task of the Head Teacher is to supervise the conduct of tests and examinations, and timely declaration of results of students. This will help in monitoring the achievement levels of children and establishing effective remedial measures to help slow learners.
- 3. Discipline:** In order to provide an effective leadership role, she has to enforce discipline in the school. She has to be punctual in attending to the various duties of the school. In her administrative capacity she has to monitor the attendance of both students and teachers on a regular basis.
- 4. Efficient management of existing facilities in the school:** This includes efficient use of existing infrastructural facilities, effective staff management, and other available resources –laboratory, library, TLM, teachers' guides, sports and play materials, etc.
- 5. Effective Liaison with the Local community:** She interacts with the community through 'School Management Committee' meetings. She also uses community resources effectively for the development of the school,
- 6. Supervision of the extra-curricular activities organized by the school** – organization of sports,



games, cultural activities, school exhibition, observance of national and other important days, annual tour and visits of students to places of academic, cultural and historical interest, participation of school students in various types of competitions conducted at different levels, etc. – the Head Teacher plays a crucial role in all these activities.

### **Factors Influencing The Head Teacher To Adopt A 'Leadership Role'**

However, the ability of the Head Teacher to take on an effective leadership role in the school depends on a host of factors – her age, gender, qualification, experience, professional training, seniority over other teachers in the school, size of the school, size of each class, number of classes which come under the multi-grade category, the ability to effectively manage various incentive schemes including the mid-day meal programme, and the amount of support she gets from her colleagues in the school and the supervisory staff like the Cluster Resource Person (CRC), the Block Resource Coordinators (BRC) and others at the Block level. Besides her leadership role is also limited by the physical, human and academic resources available to her within the school.

### **Limitations For A Government School Head Teacher**

While discussing the leadership role of a Head Teacher, we should consider the significant differences (and also limitations) that exist in the roles played between government and private school head teachers. In a private school, there is little community (or even governmental) interference in the working of the school and the question of discipline (both among teachers and students) is usually taken for granted.

But not so in a government school, where the Head Teacher has to negotiate with all her skills in these matters – treading cautiously with community leaders as well as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and the perennial problem of maintaining discipline at both student and teacher levels. There is also the other important issue of maintaining cordial relationship with all the (government) supervisory staff right from CRP to the Block level education officer.

Besides, a government school Head Teacher faces a whole lot of issues, which are not faced in private schools –

- (i) Make significant efforts to bring out-of-school children back to school.
- (ii) To be constantly on the lookout for drop-outs and

continuously interact with the parents of such children to minimize the prevalence of drop-outs.

(iii) To efficiently handle all incentive schemes, so that there are no complaints from parents and supervisory staff in this regard.

(iv) Multi-grade situations which are prevalent in most of the government schools today do not give much leeway or freedom for the Head Teachers either to innovate or try new strategies academically.

(v) Achievement of gender parity among children, which is a challenge especially in rural areas and urban slums,

(vi) Supervision of mid-day meal programme on a daily basis.

(vii) Ability to work with teachers who have varied qualifications, training, experience, backgrounds, and who have varying levels of knowledge of content and pedagogy.

(viii) Tackling various equity related issues and walk a tight rope so that she is not alienated either by own colleagues or by the local community.

There are also various other factors which act as limitations for Head Teachers in providing effective leadership role in a government school:

#### **a) Systemic Factors:**

(i) Large scale expansion of primary education facilities by respective state governments, without addressing quality concerns,

(ii) Inefficient transfer policy which takes into consideration the needs of teachers but not those of schools,

(iii) Existence of vacancies in the school for long duration,

(iv) improper filling up of vacancies by the authorities,

(v) Overburdening of Head Teachers with distribution of several incentives,

(vi) Mass recruitment of teachers and low achievers opting for teachers' jobs,

(vii) Poor and inadequate infrastructure facilities in the school,

(viii) Lack of adequate academic resources within the school,

(ix) Frequent summoning of head teachers to Block offices

for collection of incentives, collection of data, meetings, etc.

(x) A high Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) and consequently a bigger class size,

(xi) The mid-day meal scheme in several states has put severe strain on the professional work of the head teachers

(xii) Use of Head Teachers in several non-academic and non-departmental activities – revision of voters lists, census, all types of elections, - which consume a lot of academic time and force the head teachers to neglect school work.

### **b) Professional/Academic Factors**

(i) Lack of professionalism by Head Teachers in the discharge of their duties,

(ii) lack of proper training of Head Teachers in school leadership,

(iii) Poor academic support from the supervisory staff.

(iv) Low quality of textbooks, and Teaching learning material (TLM)

(v) Inadequate teacher resource materials,

(vi) No detention policy at the elementary stage which is a disincentive for children to learn,

(vii) Lack of motivated teachers,

(viii) Multi-grade teaching is a major factor, especially in a majority of government lower primary schools, as both the Head Teacher and other teachers will have to strive to maintain discipline - sidelining other academic activities.

(ix) Teacher absence which is a major hindrance in the effective functioning of schools,

(x) Size of the school – a smaller school has got obvious advantages,

(xi) Size of the Class – a larger class means that students get individual attention for shorter duration,

### **C) Social Factors**

(i) Indifference of the local community towards the affairs of the school,

(ii) Inability of the community to provide requisite facilities in the school,

(iii) Local leaders sending their children to private schools and

hence indifferent to the affairs of the government school,

(iv) Too much interference in school affairs by local leaders,

(v) Local level politics which usually hinders the efficient functioning of the school,

(vi) Functionally non-existent school management committees.

In the current scenario, there are also several other factors which act as disincentives for a Head Teacher to perform his leadership role effectively:

1. In several states, there is no separate cadre of Head Teachers in primary schools, and the senior most teacher in the school, is designated as the Head Teacher. This is also true in the case of smaller schools in almost all states (as well as, in all lower primary schools in all states) where the senior most teacher is simply designated as the Head Teacher.

2. When a senior teacher, for some reason, declines to work as a Head Teacher, then invariably the mantle falls on a junior teacher who cannot perform the role of the Head Teacher effectively, given the various constraints under which she has to work.

3. In some states, where the Head Teacher's post exists, the ratio of the head teacher to regular teachers is so small, that only some of them get promoted on seniority basis, that too, at the fag end of their service, when they may be having only a few years or a few months to retire. In such cases, they would like to retire peacefully, and not worry about improvement of the school.

Finally, I feel that it is for the departmental supervisory staff to instill a sense of confidence in the Head Teachers, motivate and train them to perform their leadership role effectively in the school.

Looking back at the vintage 60's and 70's, when there was no element of compulsion of schooling, I would put the number of dedicated Head Teachers at the elementary level at more than 70%. Even without professional training, they were performing admirably due to their scholarship, seniority and respect that they commanded among their colleagues and students.

Perhaps, I can also say the same thing about the performance of a majority of students, who at the primary class 5 level, could then fluently read, write and perform

basic mathematical operations. This percentage has declined considerably in recent years due to factors already discussed.

I feel the role of Head Teachers has also been a critical factor in this regard.

---

**D. Jagannatha Rao** was formerly Director of the Department of State Educational Research and Training (DSERT) Karnataka. During his career spanning 37 years he held many positions from the block level to the state level. He was the Director of Public Instruction in Karnataka from 1999 till 2006. In this capacity, he was in charge of the Directorates of Secondary Education, Janashala Project, North-East Karnataka Directorate and finally DSERT. He has authored the book Elementary Education in India Status, Issues and Concerns published in 2010 and headed many education committees post retirement. He may be contacted at [djrao303@yahoo.com](mailto:djrao303@yahoo.com).



Nivedita Bedadur



**1** 982 : A typical schoolday at Kendriya Vidyalaya (KV). The day begins with just the same last minute scuffle for signing the attendance register and collecting class registers. You stand by and watch while the teachers hurry on to class and then to the assembly. Somebody side tracks you with an application for leave. The Activities In Charge gives you input on the day's events. Assembly over; talk to latecomers, observe classes, teach, attend to parents, office matters, planning for functions, exams, parent teacher meetings. There were days when life was peaceful - and schools, happy places. Principal and teachers collaborated in capacity building measures for the school, self and students. School improvement was the joint responsibility of the staff. What was the role of the Principal? Not beyond being a manager.

Admission rules were prescribed, broad guidelines of curricular and co curricular practices were given, administrative and financial practices were outlined with restraints in place. Within these confines the Principal was the deciding authority, the true 'head of the family'. The head took decisions regarding classroom practices, co-curricular practices. The school climate, the school culture, innovation in class room practices, theories of learning, counseling and career development of students and staff - all these were dealt with, at school level. Accountability of the school head was measured by results in Class X and XII as well as by financial practices. But the real measure was by the students and parents. There was very little monitoring and very little interference. There was more autonomy then. But was there more accountability?

15 years later : A revolution. Imperceptibly and slowly, change crept into class room practices and the school

climate. More expectations, more monitoring, more workshops, more training, more letters, more replies. Principals became information dispensing machines. Admission rules were tightened. Information regarding the infrastructure, admission, retention, gender, religion, caste-based data, evaluation, assessment had to be sent regularly. The computer revolution changed the way information was sought and given. Now we had to send things by email, fax them and repeat them over telephone. This Tech Monster was slowly engulfing the school. Time was a casualty. Principals no longer looked into the class room. They could - with difficulty - maintain contact with the students and staff on a daily basis.

The KVS was clear about one area of work which was autonomously handled i.e. classroom practices. Principals were always directors of training courses. They whetted their hands at these courses by being the first ones to orient themselves.

2002 : School appearance becomes important. The centre loosens its purse strings. Administrative decisions were taken at the central level and this sent a huge windfall into the Principal's lap. Money became easily commissioned and dreams began to come true. Immediately, Principals spruced up the lobby, bought carpets and sofas for their rooms did them up in style! Class rooms began to look bright and airy. We could give contractual appointment for labour and provide for infrastructure. Autonomy in infrastructural changes - with easy sanction of funds - brought with it its own set of problems: more financial procedures - more financial accountability!

### **KENDRIYA VIDYALAYA Diu: The Meaning Of Autonomy : Lessons Learnt The Hard Way.**

There is a small school in a place called Diu - a tiny little island tucked away in the armpit of Gujarat. This is a laid back tourist place with only a collectorate, fisherfolk, indigenous Anglo Indian population with Portuguese as well as Indian passports and an airstrip managed by the Indian air force. The KV, which is midway between Diu and the airport, is

*More expectations, more monitoring, more workshops, more training, more letters, more replies. Principals became information dispensing machines.*



in a village called Fudam; with 300+ students in Classes 1 to 10. The KV was run in 5 rooms borrowed from the Government High School, Fudam, which had 4 to 5 rooms in which 2 Government schools ran in shifts. These rooms were ethnic looking huts (from outside) with the plaster peeling off the walls that were themselves falling to pieces. Two classes were held in one room and one in the office. The sea would come flooding in on rainy days and no drinking water was available. Yet my class ten first batch did me proud. The Government school and the Kendriya Vidyalaya which shared rooms, also shared the local management.

There was a staff problem in the Kendriya Vidyalaya at Diu. One of the reasons was that the village Fudam - where the school was situated - did not permit outsiders to stay there. Fudam was a village where only housewives stayed, the husbands were away most of the year on ships. An unwritten diktat ruled that no house would be rented out. Hence, teachers were compelled to stay far away. Despite several attempts to engage in dialogue with the community elders, there was no success in securing accommodation for teachers and hence, a staff shortage. With ad hoc staff who had no training; quality education was a far off dream. The teacher who arrived to school on a battered cycle lived miles away from his family, and simply counted days before his transfer. Textbooks were not available. If I had autonomy, would I have been able to find a viable solution to this problem? Could I have decided to shift the school to a different location? How did my lack of autonomy interfere with the solutions that we as the school team found, to this problem? We worked together to help those who wished to move closer to their families with their transfers. Those who stayed on, rallied together; school timings were tweaked

a little. Teachers took over the financial matters and book keeping tasks. No other teacher was unnecessarily troubled to stay back after school. Matters like 'Post', 'denomination' simply dissolved. A primary teacher who had a good understanding of mathematics taught the newly minted batch of Class X. There was no Principal's office. I was sitting with Class IX and working while I was surrounded by them.

In Diu lack of autonomy created problems. I did not have rooms, water, toilets, furniture, staff and I had financial restrictions. The will was there. The BEO built two rooms for my school through SSA funds in record time!! I enlisted the help of my husband and got a local carpenter to repair all the old benches for a song. I permitted all my new staff to stay in the school premises till they found accommodation. An old unused toilet was cleaned and repaired. A Class X parent provided a tanker whenever we had water shortage. And the ocean always obliged us with company which we had to clean up after. Staff allocation was done in an innovative way using the services of the staff wives who helped out with the clerical work on almost honorary basis. Being with their husbands made them feel safe. It also helped them do their practicums for D Ed.



If I had autonomy I would have perhaps given longer and comfortable stays to new recruits in the few hotels nearby, till they found suitable quarters. Perhaps, too, I would have had the school building and staff quarters on first preference immediately without any delay, instead of the back and forth that I was doing with the Delhi office, collectorate and local administration. Less autonomy here meant more time and effort spent in writing entreaties, visiting offices and authorities to sort out problems. But answers did turn up

and land was eventually sanctioned for the KV.

### **Parental Expectations And Autonomy:**

The Principal is never a part of the visioning or policy-making process. These are made in ivory towers and translated to reality in the grassroots. It is the Principal who inherits the ideology that she translates into practice. Today, we talk about quality education. But parents think of this only in terms of marks and grades. They want their children to be competitive. When CBSE decided to do away with marks for the primary section and adopted grades, there was stiff opposition from parents. Even today, when there is a plethora of alternate and lucrative careers, parents want their children to take up science and become engineers and doctors. Changing mindsets is thus a very slow and painful process. When CBSE abolished the Class X board exams, one of our staff members lamented, 'You know, my son will just not study.' Yes, your son will not rote learn, but can't he go on a voyage of discovery and learn what he is interested in? Parents want tangible measurement, as they will only then be convinced that you are teaching something and that their children are learning. The fear regarding continuous and comprehensive evaluation is that it is 'subjective' and, therefore, 'biased'. What kind of autonomy do parental aspirations, community constraints, political ambience and geographical conditions leave to the Head of the school? Should the Head of the school have autonomy to go beyond or against parental aspirations?

If we are to cater to far flung areas, in the midst of political upheavals with community constraints, the Head has to seamlessly align autonomy and vision with these conditions. Schools in Kerala and Kathmandu do not only share a 'K',

*The Principal is never a part of the visioning or policy-making process. These are made in ivory towers and translated to reality in the grassroots. It is the Principal who inherits the ideology that she translates into practice.*

they also share a feature of having to close them down due to Maoist (Communist) 'bandhs'. It is often difficult to close down a school when the safety of children is a prime concern. The children are safer in the school than out on the roads. When will schools be spared political shenanigans and become autonomous entities?!

In 2007, the American Institutes of Research and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute released a report titled "The Autonomy Gap," which argued that principals, who shoulder much of the burden of accountability systems, typically lack the authority that they need to really improve student performance, especially when it comes to school staffing.

### **Autonomy In Private Schools**

Many heads of government schools like Kendriya Vidyalayas, State Board schools, Navodaya Vidyalayas would bemoan the lack of autonomy in hiring and firing staff. This is a matter of concern for a Head, as the effort required to turn around the attitudes or abilities of staff members would take precious time away from bringing quality into academics and translating the vision of the school into reality.

But, in some private schools where Heads do have this autonomy, they face challenges due to a high attrition rate - till the schools are on a sound financial footing and can afford to pay competitive salaries. They are accountable to the parents - who pay heavy fees to educate their children. They must offer them a good menu : scholastics, sports, activities and an assurance of later admission to prestigious colleges at home and abroad. They must become product minting machines churning out high achievers, great sportspersons and multifaceted supermen. The Principals of such schools are often under tremendous pressure; tossed between the management and parents. No wonder then, they feel that their autonomy is seriously threatened by the Right to Education charter! How will they ensure quality if their student intake is 'diluted' by the have-nots?? They have valid reasons for their opposition and are not thinking about autonomy but about the interests of the children under their care. They are also worried about the skill set required by the teacher to create the readiness and inclusive atmosphere, in the class, to handle this heterogeneity of baffling dimensions. Lack of clarity in RTE provisions regarding procedures for admissions of disadvantaged students, ground level challenges like handling differences in competency levels, creating assessment criteria which are

Board compliant and within the range of student ability, plus huge teething problems envisaged in the initiation of the process suddenly find Principals in unenviable positions.

"A field study in Assam reveals that the role perception of Head Teachers at all levels of school education is confined to a general view of performing certain duties required of them by virtue of powers delegated to them by the Education Department. These duties are: (a) administrative, i.e., daily administration of the school covering all activities and administrative aspects of running an institution; (b) financial, i.e., maintenance of school accounts and cashbook; collection of funds; disbursement of salary to the staff, etc. and (c) academic, i.e., classroom teaching and supervision of school staff. This view needs to be broadened through a

systematic and sustained effort by education authorities in order to help the head teachers go beyond the fine tuning of what currently exists and implement school development programmes more effectively."

We seriously need to create an inclusive process through which Head Teachers are part of the Policy think tanks. The visioning and planning of schools need to be done with practicing Principals/ Head Teachers on board. They are the ones who direct the vision through the alleyways of grassroots experience. Coercing change will produce reactions like the kind of stiff opposition to RTE provisions by Private School Principals. Acknowledging the challenges faced by Head Teachers and preparing them for change is only the first step.

### References:

Role of Head teachers in School Management in India : Case Studies from Six States : Research coordinated by R. Govinda : Asian Network of Training and Research Institutions in Educational Planning : (ANTRIEP) in collaboration with The European Commission.

---

**Nivedita Bedadur** is a specialist with the Academics and Pedagogy team at Azim Premji University Resource Center, Bangalore. She holds an M.Phil in English Language and Literature. She has worked for 27 years as a teacher, Vice Principal and Principal in Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan and as Principal of Dr D. Y. Patil Academy's Shantiniketan, Kolhapur. In recognition of her services she was given the Incentive Award for Teachers in 2004 by the Human Resources Ministry.

Nivedita has contributed articles and poems for 'Sangam', the in-house magazine of Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan. She has also written workbooks for the Maharashtra State Board syllabus and is presently writing a structural and communicative grammar book for Class VII to be published by Encyclopedia Britannica. Her areas of interest are ELT, teacher training and research. She may be contacted at [Nivedita@azimprmjifoundation.org](mailto:Nivedita@azimprmjifoundation.org).





There are many forms of leadership which emerged during different historical contexts and continue to be in our midst, perhaps a shade differently but true to their role and interaction with society. We have the warriors who have moved from the battlefield to the boardroom or are the frontline entrepreneurs; the kings who now grace many occasions and are the patrons; there are the background advisors easily recognizable as the consultants of today; we have our shepherds who tap the stray ones in our institutions and organizations; and perhaps other kinds too. Many of these leaders live to influence the education arena of today. What confounds the present situation is that one does not acknowledge the past; which is a subconscious player, and the present is not understood in its psycho-affective dimensions.

The other 'hard spot' for leadership in schools and education programs is that the nature of the primary task that needs to be done is intangible, and the leadership has to enable the faculty, the staff to work towards these intangible results, with no clear cut principles to guide. As a result, unconsciously or consciously, the efforts by different stakeholders go towards making everything and anything into something that one can see and hold on to, to say that one has achieved what one has set out to do. These are often the non-essentials or the peripherals of the education program, hence creating an illusion, rather than addressing deeper underlying issues.

Within this culture of ambiguity and the pressure to perform, leaders, be they heads of schools, academic supervisors,

coordinators, civil servants, trainers or consultants, fall into the trap of trying to create evidence to show the performance of the individual or the organization or the system.

As a result, schools end up assessing students on bits of information, rather than on meaningful knowledge; showcase children's talents on 'annual days' without a link to the community's means of expression; micro-plan for the teacher with results that turn into mechanistic rituals soon enough; or just give up one way or the other and abandon the children to meander through their years of schooling.

However, this does not imply that everything about schooling and learning is intangible or vague. There are areas that need to be clearly outlined, say for instance, the processes of learning, rather than content alone; or a framework for the teacher, within which s/he can plan; a range of ideas for developing certain skills; an overall schema with elements for the child to choose. These need to go to the core of conceptual learning and living which could be set out and defined. The rest that cannot be spelt out in such a mode could perhaps be described; and the education community has to arrive at a sense of comfort that some critical aspects of learning and living are amorphous by nature.

At times, educators take a stand to say that all of schooling can be made measurable and some go to the other extreme to argue that nothing of it can be made SMART. If it becomes an 'all or nothing' dichotomy, escape routes sprout up aplenty and the business of the school, creating an environment for learning as "assistance to life" for children, often runs aground.

With this as an unarticulated backdrop for the present school leaders, who are often qualified for some other functions but not trained to be leaders, most of the actions and activities taken up are ad-hoc, with slogans taking over instead of sound principles; and personal ideas becoming dominant, rather than worked through practices.

Territories are also bounded and not allowed to be porous; hierarchical relationships and status quo is maintained rigidly; as a safeguard against the fears of functioning with such

*The other 'hard spot' for leadership in schools and education programs is that the nature of the primary task that needs to be done is intangible, and the leadership has to enable the faculty, the staff to work towards these intangible results, with no clear cut principles to guide.*

unstated objectives and an unclear overarching purpose. An outer order is maintained with the inner functions in disarray. And so, the minutiae become all important, and turn into the crutches of a disabled system.

In spite of this not-so-supportive scenario, the human spirit and the genius of the Indian mind have found ways to survive and live with energy. Recently, visiting a school for children from the tribal communities in Chindwara district, Madhya Pradesh, where an NGO was enabling the community to put in place the requirements of the Right to Education Act and other national commitments, it was with love and compassion that the community and the teacher interacted and still stood for the rights of the children. The teacher was not made a villain or a victim and he too worked with the community with a magnanimity that is not easy to come by. The children put up a play about punishments in school, making fun of a typical teacher and he took it in his stride; and even enjoyed it, without being embarrassed.

He was easy as a teacher, and was a spontaneous leader while being the 'in-charge Headmaster'. He was helping to bring in changes in the classroom culture, allowing the community to be a dynamic intrinsic part of the school; and gave space to the NGO activists; even as he, being the face of the education department in the village, stood his ground and spoke for his department when required.

Where there was a gap was in the quality of learning, for which he was not given the support from the Department or from any other source. He was limited in this area by the unprofessional training given for teachers with no continued hand-holding or a system for his own development as a teacher, or as a mentor for others. The lacunae was obvious with the children not being on par in conceptual understanding, not in comparison with any other group, but what could be expected of any child of a particular age. He relied on his own inner resources to be a wonderful leader but where the education department had to come in to help him as a teacher, as a leader, to make learning happen - the main function of the school - there was not just a gap, but a gaping chasm.

When an appraisal was done for a government program in another state, it was found that one-third of the schools in the sample had "in-charge HMs", with the posts lying vacant for many months. Why is it that the lack of a head or a leader is not taken seriously by even the forward-looking

states?

Planning, which is a necessary responsibility of any leader of an institution or a program, is often not understood in its entirety or even in a simple manner. Working along with a state in eastern India and in another instance with the principals of training institutions, when an annual plan was made, the element of scheduling within a timeframe was totally missing. Could the draft be called a plan if dates and months are not mentioned?

The education system has to realize the urgency for developing leaders, many of whom fortunately have some dormant skills -from their own life experiences, but need that little bit extra to become leaders who are not egoistic and full of themselves, but can in turn help others to come to the forefront, to be leaders in their own spheres.

Could the leader be the warrior, fighting the battle shoulder

*The education system has to realize the urgency for developing leaders, many of whom fortunately have some dormant skills -from their own life experiences, but need that little bit extra to become leaders who are not egoistic and full of themselves, but can in turn help others to come to the forefront, to be leaders in their own spheres.*

to shoulder with the teacher? Whether they have the experience of working in the elementary school or not, need not be an issue, but can they help on the classroom floor?

Could the leadership provide a ear to listen to the troubles and woes of a teacher? Even as one goes as an 'outsider', teachers bereft of anyone to listen to them, or to express their worries and their anxieties to, often lament in desperation. One may not have the advice or provide an answer but could the leader offer the time and space for the teachers to share, which may lead to finding their own solutions most times?

Could the leader be the organizer, the shepherd to arrange the academic nourishment and support required for people

under his or her care to be in line with the overall purpose of the school system?

Could the leadership enable a teacher to exercise his own power as a king or a queen of the classroom, not to patronize but develop a democratic culture, aligned to the goals of the country?

Would the teacher say to the head -

"Lead, Kindly Light... I do not ask to see

The distant scene; one step enough for me."

Or would the teacher prefer to say,

"...Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action..."

Is the teacher to do as he is told, step by step, as a foot soldier; or could the vastness and the depth of his or her task be opened up for enabling and truly empowering the teacher by the education leadership of today?

---

**Amukta Mahapatra** is currently the Director of SchoolScape – an organization focused on the development of the teacher and other support cadres to enable schools, organizations and education departments to enhance the quality of learning in the classroom. Having consulted with many national and international organizations and the government on teacher education and development, her insight in the education sector is valuable. She may be contacted at [amukta.m@gmail.com](mailto:amukta.m@gmail.com).



**A. The Context: India's Rural Government Schools**

From Yadgir in North East Karnataka to Banaskantha and Sabarkantha in Gujarat, Vidisha and Datia in Madhya Pradesh, Tonk and Sirohi in Rajasthan or Uttarkashi and Udhamasinghnagar in Uttarakhand, the story is the same. Less than 10% of our government elementary schools are able to ensure that all the three basic criteria of universal elementary education – universal enrolment, retention or regular attendance and achievement of learning outcomes - are being fulfilled. While universal enrolment is probably being met by over 90% of our schools, the average attendance of children in most schools would be around 70%. But the killer is that less than 10% of schools can demonstrate the achievement of adequate learning outcomes for a majority of the children, while the other 90% are clearly performing poorly.

Why are only a few schools successful in overcoming the constraints that confront all our schools in India? They are not “great” schools – with great vision, great goals, great classroom processes and children with great critical thinking and conceptual abilities. However, these schools are heroic simply because they are able to demonstrate that every child in their school is learning in a warm and enabling environment. They are far removed from greatness - but they have crossed the chasm. It is in the context of having been able to overcome constraints that we refer to them as “successful schools”. It is within this context - and limited definition of success - that we examine the factors that make these schools “successful”.

**B. The Research Bed: Learning Guarantee Program**

Learning Guarantee Program - a joint initiative of the state government and Azim Premji Foundation – was implemented in seven districts of North East Karnataka during 2002-2005 and in the subsequent years in 8 districts of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand. The program's overarching aim was to advocate and influence change in assessment and through that, to also influence change in classroom teaching-learning processes. The means to drive this was through an assessment of participating schools with a 'reward and recognition' component for schools that met (or exceeded) the assessment criteria. The criteria were kept to the basic requirements of universal elementary education: a) Schools had to ensure 100% enrolment; b)

**D D Karopady****S Giridhar**

at least 90% of children had to have regular attendance and c) at least 60% of children had to demonstrate learning outcomes assessed through competency-based written and oral tests. Successful schools were those that met all these three criteria. The Learning Guarantee Program thus provided Azim Premji Foundation with a rich vein of data for research and analysis.

For consecutive years of the Learning Guarantee Program in Karnataka, a sample of “successful” schools and “the other schools” was studied, to obtain an understanding of the factors that differentiated the ‘successful schools’ from the ‘other schools’ and also to identify factors that did not have any bearing on their ‘success’. The study covered 240 schools, of which 68 were ‘successful’ as identified in the Learning Guarantee Program. 900 teachers (including the Head Teachers) were interviewed, of whom 250 teachers belonged to the ‘successful’ schools. Schools were evaluated on the basis of quantitative measures such as school infrastructure, school management, the socio-economic

*“Why are only a few schools successful in overcoming the constraints that confront all our schools in India? .... We clearly found that effective school leadership and a team of committed and motivated teachers are the key differentiators”*

background of enrolled children and community factors such as the functioning of the School Development & Monitoring Committee (SDMC) and the presence of active NGOs in the village.

In parallel, a detailed qualitative study to observe the class room and schools in a sample of 21 schools (comprising 11 'successful' and 10 'other' schools) was conducted. Trained investigators spent a few days in each school, interacting and discussing with parents, children and other community members and documenting all their observations. The qualitative measures included attitude and commitment of teachers, quality of teaching and classroom practices.

Findings from these studies underscore the critical role of

school leadership and show how good, committed school leadership can – within the constraints and without need for too much external support – ensure that their schools function efficiently and pleasingly. They are not doing something extraordinary. It is about how the school leaders get the basics right and do the simple things consistently well.

**C. Factors That Do Not Make A Difference**

To an extent, this is the section that blows away some myths and some romantic notions. Each of us, at some point or the other, gives a lot of credence to certain factors, but our study showed us - very clearly - the factors that do not seem to make any difference.

**Factors that do not differentiate between 'Successful' and 'Other' schools**

Infrastructure		Head Teacher, Teacher Profile	
Bus reaches within 0.5 km of school	X	Gender	X
Pucca building	X	Caste / category	X
Anganwadis on premises	X	Age	X
Compound wall	X	Average total experience	X
Electricity	X	Education level	X
Play ground	X	Live in the same village	X
Avg. number of class rooms	X	Married	X

X = No statistically significant difference between successful and other schools on this factor

**1. Infrastructure Related Indicators:**

There does not seem to be any statistically significant difference between 'successful' and 'other' schools on many of the infrastructure indicators such as: a) Pucca building; b) Anganwadis on premises; c) public transport close to school; d) play ground facilities; e) compound wall; f) number of class rooms.

**2. Profile Of The Teacher And Head Teacher:**

A typical teacher in a successful school is very much like his/her counterpart in other schools. Thus, the caste, gender, age, educational qualifications and working experience of the teachers do not seem to be significantly different across the two categories. Another fondly held notion - that if the teacher belongs to, or lives in, the same village, it will have a positive impact on the school - was belied. The study found 31% of teachers in 'successful' as well the 'other' schools live in the same village while 69% teachers in both categories travel some distance everyday to the school. Very clearly, the profile of the teacher does not seem to influence

the success of the school in any way. Thus, many of the infrastructure and teacher demography-related parameters did not have a major bearing on learning outcomes and were not significantly different between 'successful' and 'other' schools.

**3. Multi- Grade Teaching:**

80% of all our rural government primary schools are multi-grade schools and in our study, too, we found that both categories of schools – the 'successful' schools and 'other' schools - had equally high percentage of multi-grade schools (around 80%).

**D Factors That Make A Difference**

We clearly found that **effective school leadership** and a **team of committed and motivated teachers** are the **key differentiators**. These sterling qualities are a striking feature of 'successful' schools and, in stark contrast, are missing in the 'other' schools. What are the indicators that compel us to draw this conclusion?

**Factors that differentiate between 'Successful' and 'Other' schools**

School Characteristics		Extra Efforts of Teachers	
Good school appearance	✓	Extra classes for identified children	✓
Availability of Drinking water	✓	Activity based learning	✓
Usable toilets for children	✓	Additional reading material	✓
Head Teacher Present	✓	Practice and drill with question papers	✓
Up to date student and teacher registers	✓	Other teaching methods	✓
Punctuality of teacher & Head Teacher	✓	<b>Parents, SDMC and Community support</b>	
Teaching Learning Material in class rooms	✓	Focus on Enrolment and Attendance	✓
Length of experience of the Head Teacher in the school	✓	Donations to School	✓
		Active Involvement in school	✓

✓ Statistically significant difference between successful schools and other schools on this factor

**1. Punctual And Ever Present Head Teacher And Teachers**

This is the defining differentiator. All subsequent good practices and differentiators that are observed in the successful schools flow from this particular feature. In the successful schools, all the Head Teachers and over 90% of teachers are punctual. Further, over 92% of Head Teachers of 'successful' schools are found to be present in the school premises, during school hours. In contrast, only 73% of Head Teachers of the other schools are found within the school premises during school hours in the rest of the schools. The observation of over 90% punctuality and presence of teachers in the 'successful' schools is also significant, in the context of the findings of PROBE I and PROBE II reports as well as the "Teacher Absence in India" study by Michael Kremer and Karthik Muralidharan, which indicate that, on an average, 25% of teachers in Indian government schools are absent.

**2. Organized, Well-Managed School Practices**

There is the efficiency of a well-oiled unit about the successful schools. These schools are better in terms of cleanliness, neatness and orderliness. There is a daily morning assembly that is crisp and timely. All the record books – teacher attendance, student attendance, admissions register, the notice board, class timetables, etc – are up to date and well-maintained. Database of students is also available instantly. School uniforms, stationery and text books have been supplied to all students at the beginning of the academic year without delay. The mid day meal is organized and executed without fuss. There is a marked absence of serious fights

among children and markedly lesser prevalence of corporal punishment in these schools. There is a planned meeting of the teachers every day - before and after school - to discuss and review the day's plans.

**3. Commitment Of Teachers – Going The Extra Mile**

Our research showed that 'successful' schools visibly made extra efforts to provide additional inputs to children. These were carried out with great intensity and many of these schools reported taking extra classes on holidays and after school. Several schools identified the relatively "weaker" children and provided them with special inputs. They provided additional reading material. They created model question papers and used them in "drill and practice" with the children. All these measures might seem mechanical, but in the context of the existing situation, these were viewed as significant positive measures.

**4. Support From Parents And School Development & Monitoring Committee (SDMC)**

The cooperation from the SDMC members and president in the 'successful' schools was higher and the support was in the nature of increasing attendance, supplying learning material, providing infrastructure, improving admission, and giving financial help to schools. In these successful schools, 73% of parents paid regular visits to monitor the progress of children and hold discussions with teachers. The absence of 'education' among parents is higher in the 'other' schools category, where more than half are uneducated. While 54.7% of parents in other schools did not have any formal education, the corresponding figure in winning schools was 41.7%.

The qualitative study findings reinforce the quantitative data. A substantial majority of the 10 successful schools

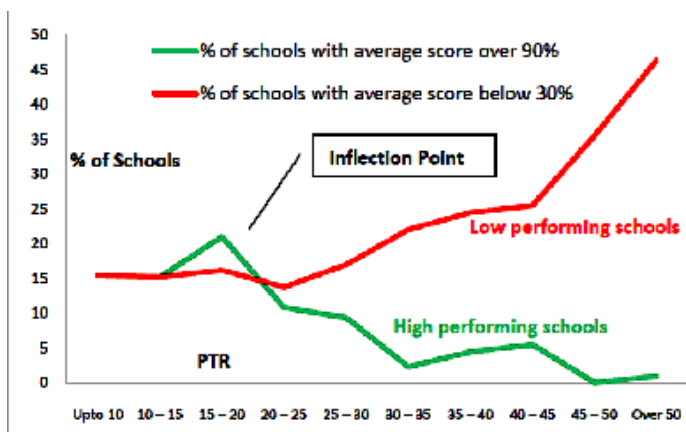
demonstrate an enabling and favourable environment as compared to the 11 other schools.

**Findings From Qualitative Study**

Qualitative study in 21 schools	Parameter	Successful Schools	Other schools
HEAD TEACHERS	Timely arrival of Head teacher	10/10	7/11
	Active supervision of school activities	8/10	5/11
	Spends extra time at school	5/10	2/11
	Books and required stationery supplied to all students	10/10	4/11
TEACHERS	Punctuality of teachers	9/10	1/11
	Interactive classroom sessions	10/10	6/11
	Work plan for all classes	5/10	3/11
	Usage of TLM in all the classes	5/10	0/11
	Activity based sessions in all Classes (with or without TLM)	7/10	3/11
	Regular checking of homework in all classes	8/10	3/11
	Special classes	8/10	4/11
	No corporal punishment	7/10	3/11
	All students arrive on time	5/10	1/11
	Absence of serious fights among students	8/10	4/11
Parents and community support (SDMC)	Once in 3 days visit to school by SDMC	10/10	4/11
	Positive opinion of the SDMC by head teacher / teachers	10/10	4/11

**5. Criticality Of Pupil Teacher Ratio:**

Empirical evidence from the Learning Guarantee Program establishes the criticality of Pupil Teacher Ratio. Schools with a PTR of less than 30 have a 25% chance of turning in good performances. On the other hand, schools with PTR of more than 40 have a less than 3% chance of delivering quality education. This is perhaps the only factor which is truly beyond the scope or control of the school leader. The graph below highlights this aspect.



**D. School Leadership Is Pivotal To Quality**

Almost all the factors that differentiate the 'successful' school can be created, influenced or driven by the school leader. In that sense, the Head Teacher plays the pivotal executive role in establishing the quality of his or her school. In a lower primary school, more often than not, one of the teachers takes up the additional role of Head Teacher. However, upper primary schools have a designated Head Teacher to provide leadership and mentorship to a minimum of seven teachers, assign roles, decide time tables, manage administration and team dynamics, review performance, identify issues and take decisions, and supervise the administration of a large campus.

It is absolutely ironical that for such a complex task, virtually none of the Head Teachers have been trained. They are nominated or selected for the task of leading the school and literally thrown into the deep end to learn on the job and cope with it. The 10% of schools who are currently 'successful' are so because their school leaders have been able to perform - despite the lack of appropriate preparation

and training. If our education system had a well thought out process of selection of Head Teachers and a strong leadership development program for them with coaching,

mentoring and sustained support there is good reason to hope that many of the "other schools" too could make the transition to becoming "successful schools".

---

**D D Karopady** is with the Research & Documentation team at Azim Premji Foundation, Bangalore. Prior to this, he was Director, market research in one of India's leading market research organizations. With over 25 years of corporate experience, he has served the development sector for 8 years now. He can be contacted at [karopady@azimpremjifoundation.org](mailto:karopady@azimpremjifoundation.org).

**S Giridhar** is Head of University Resource Center, Azim Premji Foundation, Bangalore. He may be contacted at [giri@azimpremjifoundation.org](mailto:giri@azimpremjifoundation.org).



One early morning a mother went to her sleeping son and woke him up

MOM : Wake up, son. It's time to go to school.

SON : But why, Mama? I don't want to go to school.

MOM : Give me two reasons why you don't want to go to school.

SON : One, all the children hate me. Two, all the teachers hate me.

MOM : Oh! that's not a reason. Come on, you have to go to school.

SON : Give me two good reasons WHY I should go to school?

MOM : One, you are FIFTY-TWO years old and should understand your responsibilities.

Two, you are the PRINCIPAL of the school.



The aims of education of providing education of good quality to all children, of preparing children to participate actively and responsibly in the democratic set up of India, to be able to make informed choices, to be able to access opportunities for development and growth, and to lead meaningful and dignified lives have been articulated in various policy documents. And equity has always been an intrinsic part of these aims. The public education system across the country has the mandate of making available to every child the experiences that she/he needs to make these possible, essentially through the structured schooling system. We have been attempting this for over six decades and are still far from achieving the goals we have set out for ourselves.

Over the past two decades the context has been changing rapidly – today we have the RTE, and perhaps more importantly, communities across States and regions have begun articulating their aspirations from education for their children more vociferously and in larger numbers. While we have made considerable progress the pace as well the quality of our initiatives needs to change so as to move toward the goals more rapidly. There are a large number of research studies, projects and programs that are looking for ways to do this in more effective ways. Several of these show us successes that are possible. However, scaling these in appropriate ways has been a challenge and requires a separate discussion.

*Our close interaction with the system over the past three years highlights the fact that many of the issues are grounded in the culture. For example, the system has decentralized institutions that have over a period of time become institutions that, by and large, implement decisions and programs that have been conceived of at the State level.*

This note attempts to explore the dimension of institutional culture based on experiences of an Education Leadership Development Program

(ELDP) that has been implemented over the past three years in Karnataka. This is a program that has been conceived of, designed and implemented by the Policy Planning Unit (PPU) in the office of the Commissioner of Public Instruction, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Karnataka, and Centre for Leadership and Management in Public Services (C-LAMPS). The program has been supported by Azim Premji Foundation, UNICEF and the World Bank.

Briefly, the ELDP has attempted to enhance the leadership and management capabilities of the education functionaries closest to the school. This has been done through the cascade model by developing Management Development Facilitators (MDFs) from within the Department of Public Instruction. The MDFs in turn have trained Block Resource Persons (BRPs) and Cluster Resource Persons (CRPs) in twenty districts. BRPs and CRPs are resource people at the block and cluster level (a cluster is a group of 15-20 schools). In the decentralized structure of the education system these resource people have an important role of providing academic and administrative support to the schools.

The MDFs have gone through a development program spread over almost five months consisting of input sessions, opportunities for field engagements, review and reflection. A similar experience has been made possible for the BRPs and CRPs by the MDFs over a seventeen week period in which the BRPs and CRPs have implemented Quality Improvement Projects within their own role and Circle of Influence.

The Management Development Program and the Quality Improvement Projects provided a framework which provided the CRPs and BRPs with space to examine current processes and identify problems in the context of the vision and values that inform the education process. They then explored process improvement options and solutions with

the participation of the concerned stakeholders. The strong sense of ownership, responsibility and mutual accountability that emerged from this approach has enabled sustainable implementation for change. The relationships that have been forged or strengthened have created an atmosphere of better communication and mutual trust. This has happened with fellow CRPs and BRPs as well as Head Teachers and teachers at the school level.

The framework provided structured opportunities for review, reflection and peer learning. Open sharing of failed attempts without being castigated for it led to learning not only for the concerned CRP/BRP but also for her colleagues. The framework 'gave freedom' to the CRPs and BRPs to innovate and take informed/calculated risks without fear of failure. These structured opportunities for peer learning have led to building trust among them. Collaborations between and among CRPs and BRPs, and with schools, have sustained beyond the period of the project.

Though the program focused on personal transformation, the QIPs have begun a process of cultural change in small but significant ways that have the potential to be replicated. As Deming said, "Nothing changes without personal transformation."

Culture is the set of values, beliefs, norms, traditions, rituals, assumptions etc that an organization /institution builds over time. Specific to the education context, this would consist of a shared sense of purpose and values, norms for continuous learning and school improvement, responsibility for children's learning, and collaborative and collegial relationships among staff and institutions in the system. Culture has been called the "hidden curriculum" by John Capozzi, the Principal of a school in New York. Culture affects motivation among staff, affects productivity and impacts reflective practice (continuous improvement). Research shows that school cultures as well as the types of relationships among institutions in a district have an impact on school performance as well as school development.

The Department is a mammoth organization having a huge mandate and having to deal with pulls and pressures from within as well as without. As we are all aware, the common malaises that affect our public systems are also part of this system. And yet, our close interaction with the system over the past three years highlights the fact that many of the issues are grounded in the culture. For example, the

system has decentralized institutions that have over a period of time become institutions that, by and large, implement decisions and programs that have been conceived of at the State level. This is an experience that everybody working in the system, and with the system, is aware of. One of the causes is perhaps the 'control' dimension of management of organizations. How else does one control an organization that has three lakh teachers, over 50,000 schools, 8,000 other functionaries?

The question that this raises is, if one has to achieve the aims of education, what type of culture do we need within the public education system? If we consider the Department as consisting of several institutions, what type of culture should each of these institutions have that will help us to move towards the vision of education that we have? Every one of these institutions needs to create and nurture a culture that is conducive to achieving the aims of education. This implies that if a child must grow up to be an active and informed participant in the polity of the nation, and lead a life of dignity, she must experience such a microcosm of that society in her school and community. It, therefore, becomes imperative that the school provide her the structures and opportunities for such an experience. The institutions that support the school, i.e. all the structures that are positioned above the school in terms of hierarchy, need to be aligned in terms of this vision, the values that would make the realisation of that vision possible, and conceive and implement systems and processes that would be consistent with achieving that vision. After all education requires a different institutional culture from the Public Works Department!

*The question that this raises is, if one has to achieve the aims of education, what type of culture do we need within the public education system? If we consider the Department as consisting of several institutions, what type of culture should each of these institutions have that will help us to move towards the vision of education that we have?*

An educational institution that relies on control and compliance for effectiveness may not achieve its purpose for education which is about exploration, critical thinking, innovation and creativity, all of which require a certain amount of flexibility and risk taking. Inflexible rules (or rules being interpreted as being inflexible) thwart innovation and creativity. At the cluster level for example, a CRP may look for, and find, innovative and appropriate solutions to problems in her cluster if she feels she has the space to do so. This requires a certain level of trust and strong relationships bound by common purpose, the freedom to explore and perhaps make mistakes, and to learn. The support that she could provide to schools, the type of relationships that she could forge with the school and the community would make it possible to build cultures that are vibrant and buzzing. Yet, if she is running errands as she is doing today, her head and heart do not engage with these. During a candid discussion with a group of educators in the Department, a point that was articulated was that the Department views them as hands and legs and not as people with heads and hearts. Our

experience in ELDP has been that the functionaries at the grassroots have a deep understanding of the issues at their level and are able to garner the requisite resources to bring about change.

A culture of collaboration among institutions and individuals makes it possible to bring resources together that help find appropriate solutions to issues and concerns, draw up improvement plans based on analysis at the local level, and to implement the plans together with responsibility, authority and accountability shared among the functionaries. Improvement cannot take place without some risk being taken at the level where it must take place and without support from the all institutions that work with it. The ELDP experience has in a small but significant way shown us some of the possibilities at the grassroots.

Of course, sustainability requires systemic support. The challenge is to balance centralization with decentralisation for which there are no clear answers.

---

**Suparna Diwakar** has been working in the non-government sector for over two decades. A founding member of Adama Chetana and Centre for Leadership and Management in Public Services, currently she is the Project Lead for Education Leadership and Management projects of Centre for Leadership and Management in Public Services, Bangalore. Over the past four years she has been closely involved in the education leadership development program being implemented in Karnataka. She believes strongly in the mandate of public systems and their role in the transformation of society in India. She may be contacted at [suparna@c-lamps.in](mailto:suparna@c-lamps.in).





**B**rahmarakutlu Higher Primary school was a below average school on all counts. The education department had already termed it a 'low achieving' school. The parents of the villages Kallige and Thumbbe were aware of this situation since they had to face the insult of the high school teachers when they dared to admit their children in the nearby high schools. Usually it would be mild like "we are full, we cannot take more people" or as harsh as "we do not admit the children of Brahmarakutlu school" or "we do not guarantee the passing of children from Brahmarakutlu school". This was the situation in 1983 when I was asked to become a member of the school betterment committee. I took this role very seriously and entered the committee with a lot of enthusiasm. Looking back at those initial days I feel that unlike some of the famous betterment committees of our region, our committee was very mild. The teachers would convene the meeting and ask for some help and our President - a very powerful personality, would either say 'yes' or 'no' and that was the end of it. All of us were mere members nodding to whatever the President or Head teacher said.

In 1998 my daughter joined the same school in our village. This was the time when the School Development and Monitoring Committee (SDMC) was introduced and the parent body got a lot of power. The SDMC members were elected from among the parents of the children attending the school. Now, the powerless were reluctant to get in to these posts. I found that even the teachers were not appreciative of this phenomena. It was in this position that both of us (Vani, my

wife, and I) started working with our own people. We started talking about this issue and why they have to take a lead. We also convinced them that this is the government order and hence their right. We focused on a few village leaders and youth to convince the community that it is possible to work in the SDMC and that does not require them to spend a lot of money. Many got convinced and ordinary parents were elected to the SDMC. This made a marked difference. It clearly checked the phenomenon of the powerful getting more power and authority.

My friends were bitter that I was depriving my children of quality education by getting them enrolled in Government school. Now this did disturb me. Both of us (Vani & I) discussed this situation. We came to a conclusion that the differentiator between a good and bad school is the exposure the children receive. We could see that in well run private schools the children got a lot of exposure. This built their confidence and knowledge. Hence, our emphasis was on providing the exposure to the children. We planned theatre workshops, leadership camps, creativity workshops and exposure visits. The workshops that were started then continue even today with the help of the children of the initial batches. The exposure visits started with a visit to a nearby brick kiln developed further to interesting places of historic importance. What began as a small group, soon evolved into an all-class trip where all the children along with their parents participated thus helping the teachers.

The next stage was a very important stage in the History of our SDMC. We started organizing programs for the people/community through the SDMC. The first program was one on rain water harvesting. An expert in this area Sri Padre delivered a small lecture and demonstration. This evoked a lot of interest and we had a series of activities that followed. It started with a few of us adopting it in our house and in our land. By year three we had many families reaping rich harvest in this area. Eventually Vani was the president of the SDMC and we continued the involvement in the school very rigorously. We had a lot of people coming and speaking on child development, effective parenting,

*We came to a conclusion that the differentiator between a good and bad school is the exposure the children receive. We could see that in well run private schools the children got a lot of exposure. This built their confidence and knowledge. Hence, our emphasis was on providing the exposure to the children.*

teaching learning process and on communicating within the family. These decisions led to the local youth groups joining hands in conducting programs, camps, workshops in these areas. Two buildings came up. The Anganvadi which was in the village with inadequate amenities was brought into the school campus with full fledged infrastructure. The school did very well in sports and participated in cultural activities at the block level. The school brought out a magazine where children wrote on different topics. Slowly the school became the epicenter of activities in the village. Vani had to leave since our children finished their schooling and had to come out of the village for high school education.

Our children joined the Centre for Learning in Bengaluru. Here we had a very well evolved parent teacher group meeting every month without fail that discussed various topics not only restricted to education but also on larger life questions. These discussions were very rich and challenging. We were most of the time quiet in these meetings and did reflect a lot after these meetings. Unlike my village parents here the parents are very resourceful; they not only helped the school at various levels but also could comment on the academics and pedagogy of the school. One experience in CFL was my involvement in the national level seminar conducted a few years ago. In this seminar we invited more than 13 teachers from Govt. primary school of North East Karnataka and I was there throughout with them translating the deliberations and making them comfortable. In the night we used to take forward the discussion about topics triggered from the day's presentation.

I should say that my involvement in the school SDMC has definitely helped me understand the dynamics of the teacher –parent relationship and work on it.

**It is a love hate relationship:** The teacher parent relationship has a love hate tint to it. There is some sort of mistrust amongst these two groups. I see the same thread passing through my village school, CFL and the schools I work with in CFSI (Child Friendly School Initiative) Surpur as a block. In my village school it was very raw and straight between the teachers and the parents, in CFL it is highly sophisticated and subtle, in Surpur block it appears like the tension between two sections of society - illiterate poor and literate powerful. I feel that for the village poor the school had always been an outside entity coming in the way of their worked out routine and livelihood. That is why the

poor parents cannot own the school and participate in its activities whole heartedly. This mistrust cannot be erased by one or two meetings. This mistrust can be softened only by consciously and consistently working for it. And working together for a common cause or a greater cause is the only fool proof approach. I have experienced some success in my village. The Melas in Surpur school tried to bring together these two groups very successfully on a large scale where both the groups focused on showcasing the learning of the child and the school. For me the loop was completed when we had a Science and Math Mela in my village school involving 4 neighboring schools.

**Teachers don't want you to tell them how to teach:** This, I found in all these three units. Teachers feel that this is their territory. They need to concentrate and do their job everything else in this connection is a nuisance. This is one area where I have seen nothing happening in my village school, CFL and the Surpur block.

**Planning together leads to working together:** Hence, the major block is at the planning level. This was one area where we could not do much in my village school. We organized planning exercise in the month of June every year and consistently the teachers would foil it. This was successfully done by them in spite of Vani being the president of the SDMC. This is one more area where we have failed completely as a village SDMC. To make this really a meaningful process will need an organized effort with the buy in of both the department officials and the parent leaders.

**Collective leadership is crucial:** Not just representatives but the collective leadership is the most crucial element in the success of these bodies. Today the SDMC in my village

*Here we had a very well evolved parent teacher group meeting every month without fail that discussed various topics not only restricted to education but also on larger life questions. These discussions were very rich and challenging.*

is quite active. They whole heartedly supported the Science and Math Mela this year. They want to continue conducting the children workshop in the vacations. This is possible because there is a critical mass which demands it. In the initial days we spent a lot of time with individual parents on why they should participate in the school activities. Later organizing a variety of activities ranging from programs for farmers to health and personality development gave a lot of scope for different people to participate in these activities and thus in their own development process. This has created leadership qualities in many people and leaders.

**It is a long haul:** From my experience of more than 25 years in my village school it is very clear that there is no quick fix solution. Like any other development work it needs time sustained engagement. There have always been ups and downs. We have not been able to build a school of our dream. We are still working on it.

**No politics please!** This whole thing of neutrality is something that I do not understand. It is politics. Politics of the literate and rich. That is why this whole attempt of empowering the SDMC has such a lot of opposition, rejection and reluctance. Hence, capacity building of people for this role is very important. They should be empowered to raise their voice and demand what they want. Hence, working with the SDMC is with a political agenda- to empower the powerless – the politics of the poor.

**Respecting each other is the key:** We found that this was the key factor. We learnt it with a lot of causalities. In the process we lost many friends, made a few enemies. But eventually the work in the school taught us that respecting people with whom you work or deal with is central to any movement. I feel that this is the basis of any democratic process. Once people are willing to listen, consider others opinion, respect and value them a whole new value fabric gets constructed. Once this fabric of values is in place, team/group work becomes easier, meaningful and productive.

---

**Umashankar Periodi** heads the Azim Premji Institute at Yadgir district and the Child-Friendly School Initiative. He has over twenty-five years experience in the development sector. He has contributed extensively to the National Literacy Mission as well as towards tribal education in BR Hills, Karnataka. He is also the President of Karnataka State Trainers' Collective. He can be contacted at [periodi@azimpremjifoundation.org](mailto:periodi@azimpremjifoundation.org).



"Education department should motivate teachers to understand the potential of community contribution to students' learning. By strengthening the partnership with panchayats and community based organizations in the community, school leaders can enhance students' achievement and success."

-Bella Shetty, Deputy Director of Public Instruction,  
Davanagere.

It is true that leadership qualities are hidden in each of us and they come out only when the situation demands it. In Namma Shale program, the pressure percolated into every village, thus bringing out the hidden leadership qualities in teachers and Head teachers.



**Pradeep  
Ramavath**



**Ravindrakrishna**

"Teachers never get quality time to address issues relating to teaching and learning happening with in the classroom; let us to teach and let us be just teachers".

-Nagesh, Head Teacher, Manuganahalli. Gavdagere cluster.

Teaching English has been one of the consistent demands from the parents. Many are opting out of Government schools only on that ground. Immediately after the exposure visit to Kerala to understand the quality of education, parents and teachers decided that they should strengthen English teaching in their schools. Nagesh, Manuganahalli headmaster, took the first step in this direction. His daughter was studying in a private school. He studied her English books and understood that they were far more child friendly and easy to teach. Second aspect he learnt was that apart from text books, the children used a lot of workbooks to help learning. He shared this learning with parents of his school and told them that the approximate cost of such books would come to Rs.150/- per child. The parents agreed to bear the expenses. He took some of the parents to Mysore,

*"A promising foresight, an explorative school leader, pragmatic as he strategically involves the community Nagesh has many qualities that other school leaders like himself can easily emulate."*

Namma Shale is an initiative started in 4 clusters of Karnataka to strengthen school community connect through establishing a communication web among various stakeholders. For this purpose, Namma Shale program identified children, teachers, parents, School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMCs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Gram Panchayath (GP), and education managers as the seven stakeholders that affect Quality Education in government schools. The assumption was that by establishing a communication web covering all these stakeholders (Rainbow of stakeholders), we can improve the quality of education in government schools and influence the performance of teaching fraternity in Government schools. Started in 2007, as a joint collaboration with the Government of Karnataka (GoK), Department of Public Instruction and Azim Premji Foundation, Namma Shale involved formation of cluster facilitation team of 3 to 4 members in each cluster who were appointed and monitored by a local NGO. State Implementation Units (SIU) were established to undertake research, documentation and outsource people from Karnataka State Trainers' Collective (KSTC) to provide technical guidance to all those who are involved in the program.

surveyed the market and selected suitable supplementary reading materials. He learnt how to use these materials and designed lesson plans. As a result, most of the children have started learning English very fast and many of them now talk in English among themselves.

Now, Nagesh the Head teacher says, "I too have studied in Kannada medium school and I started learning English at the age of ten; I don't want my students to face similar fate. So I am making sure that children in my school should learn English early on". A promising foresight, an explorative school leader, pragmatic as he strategically involves the community Nagesh has many qualities that other school leaders like himself can easily imbibe.

### **It takes a whole community to mentor a school leader**

.....Namma Shale program's founding principle.

The experiences of Namma Shale program have proved that school leadership is effective only when it is coupled with better 'community partnership' at the local level. Hence, a strong partnership is crucial. This can be done by strengthening the 'school-community connect' and subsequently establishing a strong communication network among the two. In this context, the Namma Shale program

*In Namma Shale program, 'school-community leadership' was deeply rooted in community empowerment process. Community accepts and supports teachers assuming leadership of school, once the teaching fraternity lends itself to community demands and reciprocates to the demands of the community at large. The community is normally willing to share its responsibility in the non academic tasks of teachers; teachers must capitalize on this as it will give them more time to deliver their academic responsibilities.*

did not see 'School leadership' as a byproduct of the school-community connect; but imagined it as a 'complementary impact' of novel communication tools designed to bring the 'rainbow stakeholders' to interact in a symbiotic process.

The opinions gathered during the intervention and at the end of consolidation phase of Namma Shale program have helped practitioners involved in the implementation process to arrive at a theory of 'mutual empowerment' of both community and teachers. From its inception 'Namma Shale' has made a continued effort to develop school leadership on a sustainable basis. In the various discussions, it has emerged that the Head teacher can provide good leadership, acceptable to the community, only if he/she is ably assisted and supported by community. The department rules and procedures often hinder teachers from taking decisions related to school governance. Namma Shale provided the backend support to the school teachers by actively involving the communities in school governance processes. Local communities under the Namma Shale program are now taking proactive steps to provide additional resources required for the schools; they help in monitoring the learning of their children, midday meal program, protect the school infrastructure, mobilize funds for school development. Youth and community organizations have also joined hands with teachers to deliver better quality education in schools. Similarly, 'Namma Shale' team has designed novel training programmes and empowerment strategies to enhance the confidence of the teachers.

During the impact analysis of 'School-community leadership' training programme conducted by College for Leadership and Human Resource Development (CLHRD) - Mangalore, the Head teachers were requested to provide their understanding about 'School-community leadership'. Thirty Eight Head teachers expressed their ideal school-community leader would be one who:

- Visualizes the school building as nested within a larger community structure
- Cares for the community needs and vice versa
- Loves to spend quality time with the 'rainbow stakeholders' such as parents, teachers, children, SDMC members, members of Community Based Organizations, Gram Panchayat members and education administrators
- Carries out participatory planning and action (PPA)

of the school activities with active involvement of the community members

- e. Shares his ideas about the school improvement related to academic and non academic activities and also mobilizes the non-parent community in the resource mobilization process.

In Namma Shale program the sustainability of the 'school leadership' has two important considerations.

- It strategizes the micro-politics of educational change and re-culture the school leadership processes; both are highly prone to politicization. Hence, care should be taken while creating SDMC networks.
- Re-design of local school environment according to the

aspirations of Right to Education (RTE) act.

In Namma Shale program, 'school-community leadership' was deeply rooted in community empowerment process. Community accepts and supports teachers assuming leadership of school, once the teaching fraternity lends itself to community demands and reciprocates to the demands of the community at large. The community is normally willing to share its responsibility in the non-academic tasks of teachers; teachers must capitalize on this as it will give them more time to deliver their academic responsibilities. Such a concept of school leadership suggests a shared responsibility for a shared purpose of school development. When shared leadership is embedded in the school community as a whole, there is a much greater potential for long-term social-sustainability.

---

**Pradeep Ramavath** is a member of Education Leadership and Management team of Azim Premji University Resource Center, Bangalore. An M.Phil in Educational Planning and Administration from National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), New Delhi, he is engaged in knowledge base creation for the Namma Shale program. Pradeep's areas of interests are community participation and leadership development in education. He may be contacted at [pradeep.ramavath@azimpremjjfoundation.org](mailto:pradeep.ramavath@azimpremjjfoundation.org).

**Ravindrakrishna** is a consultant with Azim Premji Foundation in Namma Shale Project. With a Masters in Sociology, he served as Cooperative Extension officer from 1976 to 1984. He has published several study papers in the areas of Adult Literacy, Primary Education and Health, Mangaluru between 1993 to 2001. He may be contacted at [ravindrakrishna@azimpremjjfoundation.org](mailto:ravindrakrishna@azimpremjjfoundation.org).





Section C

---

# Personal Reflections

As I pondered on the title of this article, I thought about all the school heads I've known over the years. The one face that kept coming back to me was that of the founder Principal of my own school, a small, relatively unknown institution at the time but now quite a famous school in Kolkata. What made me remember her so vividly after more than 30 years, I wondered? I remember her teaching us, but have no recollection of what she taught, except that it was English grammar. I do remember though, how she knew every little detail about each student, down to our family circumstances. I remember how she would stop children in the corridor to ask after their siblings, parents or even grandparents. We were awed by her ability to know each child intimately and thought she had supernatural powers! Now I realize that she knew a crucial truth about teaching – good teachers teach children, not subjects – and when we grow up, what we remember about our teachers is not what they taught us but how they made us feel. She knew that students' personal circumstances and emotional states affected their ability to learn. This was a school leader who did something unimaginable: she thought about creating a child centric, safe and happy environment where each child could fulfill his or her potential – at a time when all other schools were chasing marks and examination results. She gave creativity a very important space, and gave as much importance to art, music and theatre as to academic subjects. A good school leader needs to be forward thinking, and the head of my school was in fact much ahead of her time.

The next school leader that I remember with fondness and respect was the head of the first school that gave me a job as a teacher. Although I worked there for only a year, what

*Good teachers teach children, not subjects – and when we grow up, what we remember about our teachers is not what they taught us but how they made us feel.*

I learned about teaching in that time is valuable to me even today. As she herself had been a teacher for many long years, she had a deep understanding of what happens in the classroom: the whole teaching-learning process.

As a result when an inexperienced teacher like me went to her with my lesson plans, she could tell me at once what would work and what wouldn't. She gave advice, but never belittled fresh, young teachers. She praised good ideas and gave solutions for problems. In fact she had the wonderful ability to mentor her teachers and bring out their best, without ever creating unhealthy competitiveness in the staff room. She herself was so excited about teaching it was difficult to not get infected by her enthusiasm! The best school leaders seem to be those who are good teachers themselves and have a thorough understanding of curricula. It's necessary in fact for all school heads to continue to teach and be involved in the daily activities of the school, in order to be more effective as leaders. Unfortunately, very few school Principals see this as a priority as they get more and more caught up in administrative duties. In the same vein, it's quite as important for a school leader as the teaching staff to participate in training sessions, to stay updated and to refresh one's skills and knowledge. I have found in my experience that quite often school leaders think it a waste of time for them to participate in any training that has been organized for their teachers.

A good school head needs to always keep in mind that it's the children who are the most important. Parents, teachers, timetables, curricula, various school activities – must all be focused towards one end, and one end only – the development of children. Once we understand this it becomes obvious why differentiation should be every school head's goal. It's time we all realized that the 'same size fit all' policy that so many schools follow actually kills a lot of human potential.

The third person who comes to my mind as an inspiring and great leader is someone who has by now established two well known schools. She has a sense of humour and



an intuitive understanding of children and how their minds work. Many a frazzled parent of teenaged children have held on to their sanity with her confident assertion “This too shall pass” ringing in their ears. Clarity of mind, quick but well considered decisions, a searing honesty and deep compassion were a few of her qualities that made her stand head and shoulders above almost everyone else, despite being actually quite diminutive in size!

In trying to think of ‘my notion of a good school head’, I have remembered some truly remarkable leaders that I have had the good fortune to come across in my life, and this list would not be complete without a mention of my mother who built a school for underprivileged children in the backwaters of

Kolkata with nothing to begin with but passion and a dogged determination to overcome all hurdles and problems. Her single mindedness of purpose and complete humility earned her respect and friendship and brought her help from several quarters to realize her dream. Her ability to stay focused on the goal to the exclusion of everything else helped others involved to stay focused as well. My mother passed away very recently and I know this determination of hers is what we will remember, and will help us to keep her dream alive.

I wonder, is it simply coincidence that all four of these people, who worked selflessly to build and shape such wonderful places of learning, are all women?

---

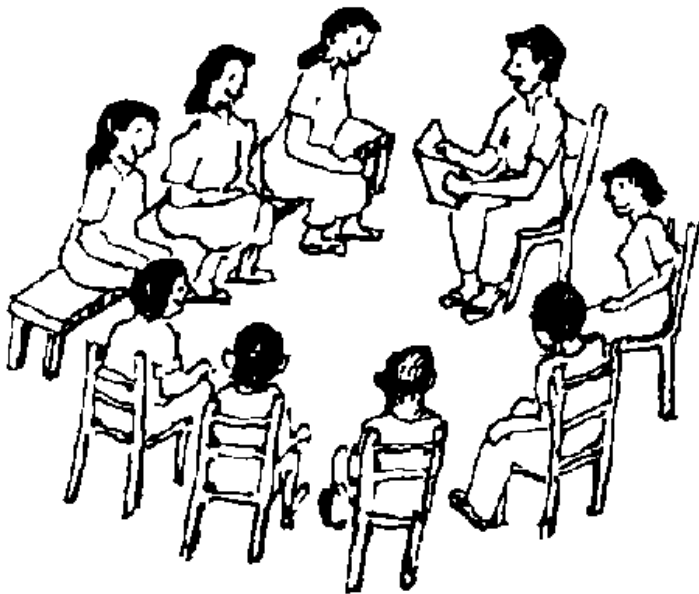
**Urmila Chowdhury** has 20 years experience teaching English, first at La Martiniere, Kolkata, and then at the Shri Ram School, New Delhi, where she eventually became the Vice Principal. She has an MA in English, B.Ed and a Cambridge certification for teaching English to adults (CELTA). Currently she is a consultant engaged in curriculum writing, teacher training and teaching English to adults. She has consulted with CBSE and the Aga Khan Foundation. She has extensive experience in teacher training and has conducted workshops in India and the Middle East. She may be contacted at [urmichow@gmail.com](mailto:urmichow@gmail.com)



*Abba. says it all, and so did Martin Luther King Jr.*

Every effective teacher has a dream. Every successful scientist has a dream. Every businessman has a dream. If you don't start with a dream, you can't cope with reality. But with a dream, you can cope with anything.

I would like to think of ideal school leadership as being the start of a good dream. After all, every school is as successful as its leadership. The ideal school leadership provides dreams based on reality and takes the child, the parents, and the teachers – the whole school family - to the objective, which is happiness, fulfillment and success. The ideal school leader



realizes that in his school each child and each teacher is an individual. Each individual has his strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, each individual has expectations and an ideal leadership provides the encouragement and the wherewithal to achieve the expectations.

Is this at all possible in a large school of many teachers and over a thousand children? Many years ago there were perhaps twenty five or thirty children per class. Today, it is more than likely that there are over fifty children, in a cramped classroom with only one teacher and very little space for activity. In days of yore a school had a playground, singing classes, extra music for those who were gifted, the annual school play, Christmas bazaars and a sports festival. The children had plenty of diverse activities and a wealth of experiences which were interesting, exciting and

challenging.

There are busy people who are involved and interested in a great many things. Such people usually have time for yet another interest because their time management skills make them energetic, healthy and full of beans. Unfortunately, there are many who are talented, do precious little and “have no time” because they are “too busy”.

In my dream the ideal school leadership focuses on 10 essential points:

1. Whole School Happiness – This is an idea mooted by John “Mr. Chips” Mason. I thought it was a brilliant idea



*In days of yore a school had a playground, singing classes, extra music for those who were gifted, the annual school play, Christmas bazaars and a sports festival.*



because I have always felt that you can judge how good a school is by the happiness quotient that you can see and feel around you. It is something we learnt in psychology at training college: “A happy child learns faster – and loves it.”

2. The ideal school is represented by a triangle in which each component of the school has a role to play – the Head, the Staff and the Home. At the centre of the triangle is the VIP – the Child.
3. Ideally the leadership will look for a school that provides outdoor spaces for climbing, running, cycling, walking, nature and all manners of creativity (a tree house? a paddling pool? a sand pit? gardening? a jungle gym? You're dreaming again, Ayesha!)
4. The Classroom. We are not in the business of interior decoration but in the business of learning. And a school



thrives when learning is exciting and every moment provides discovery, experience and a chance to explore. Every inch of space is put into use: the window sill and lots of soft board, a book corner, a nature table and a home corner. Please note that these need not be confined to nursery and kindergarten classes. The nature table at the lower levels of the school can be just as interesting as those at Class 7 and 8, where nature and science begin to take proper shape.

A home corner gives the four-year-old a chance to assume an adult role; but the older child can learn

*When we think of evaluation we usually think of children's reports and various ways of proclaiming the child's success or lack of it. Good leadership evaluates the school as a whole, and gives each member of the school family a chance to have her/his say on the school program and its success.*

carpentry or cooking as part of a home-maker's hobby.

A class which has under 30 children has a lucky teacher, but as Sr. Cyril once said, “large classes are here to stay, so find a way to cope with the numbers.” Group methods of teaching are the only way, and so the arrangement of classroom furniture will make way for easy movement between groups for both teacher and pupils.

Color is an important feature in any workplace, and has a lot to do with the weather, the ventilation and natural light. There are hot colors and cool colors, colors that soothe and colors that calm. The safest color to use on the walls is white or cream because then you can go to town with what you put on your soft boards or even what colors you paint your furniture. (Thank goodness for days of washable paint and BLUE TACK!).

5. Activity methods are a must because good school leadership believes and understands in learning by doing. Learning by heart will never be tolerated in a

good school.

6. My Dream Leader has a clear concept of education.
  - (i) Making the most of the world around us.
  - (ii) Learning to think, to solve problems and find solutions
  - (iii) Having a facilitator close at hand to suggest and encourage – and to keep quiet when required!
7. Much is spoken of freedom and my dream leadership will provide freedom, which is not licensed. Freedom of choice, freedom to work at one's own pace, freedom to choose what attracts one personally instead of “everyone has to have two blue windows and one red door”.
8. Good leadership will ensure good teaching, because it will constantly provide guidance, workshops, discussions and time for personal solutions to problems that may occur in any teacher's life. The leadership learns how to use tact and good manners to advantage so that someone who needs to be told where she is going wrong does not feel she is at an inquisition.
 

Incidentally, such workshops and discussions should also be part of the leadership program for the principal and even the governing body. I will never forget the time a local principal in Kolkata came to a TTC refresher course that was offered by the Teachers' Center and declared that age was no bar. Here was a leader who had not stopped learning, saw the value of refreshing himself and found the time to join others who were not in such an exalted position as he was. It made us all feel good.
9. Parents are an all important part of the school family. Gone are the days when curt notices said “Parents may not come beyond this point”. Today, in an ideal school, parents are part of the school and can contribute time and expertise to further any particular interest in the school curriculum.
10. Every good effort needs a regular friendly review, where we can sum up the out-and-out successes, the ideas that went slightly amiss or the effort that needs repetition. When we think of evaluation we usually think of children's report and various ways of proclaiming the child's success or lack of it. Good leadership evaluates the school as a whole, and gives each member of the school family a chance to have her / his say on the school

program and its success.

Is this a dream? I don't think so. It takes time, effort, sincerity

and honesty to achieve the dream in full measure. But we will never achieve anything if we don't review what we have done. I'm talking about constructive criticism.

***“To avoid criticism***

***Say nothing,***

***Do nothing and***

***Be Nothing”***

**My ideal dream leadership  
would never find themselves  
in that position!**



---

**Ayesha Das** has been a teacher trainer for over 35 years. Her first love is Primary education. Her special interest is reading, which she considers the most important of the three R's. "Without reading we won't get very far and so how we teach reading has to be a 100% successful" she feels. Ayesha Das did her TTC from Loreto House and followed it later with a B.A from Calcutta University. She went on to do a diploma in Education from the University of Leeds and M.Ed from the University of Manchester. She may be contacted at [ayesha.das@gmail.com](mailto:ayesha.das@gmail.com).



It is difficult to define the 'ideal' head for all schools. In fact, you could say that there is no such thing. Each school has its own unique milieu of individuals with problems and capacities entirely their own. The best principal for one school may be the worst fit for another one. Essentially since different schools have different needs and require different 'ideal' principals. Numerous factors contribute to the way a school is run and one of these is the principal. Although economic status and other capacities and limitations such as the availability of teachers play major roles in the nature of the school, the head of the institution is an integral element.

This said, I'll admit that there are some general attributes that the most desirable principals for a wide range of schools should share. The head of an institution should genuinely care about the students and should be **approachable**. There is no point in having an unapproachable principal as students and teachers alike will hesitate to bring up issues that concern them. The principal should make time for having open discussions students when needed and should seriously consider his or her opinions. She should constantly work towards improvement and should be open to suggestions from a variety of sources, including unlikely ones.

One of my principals was very inspiring in the way that she taught by example. She followed what she said and wasn't afraid to get her hands dirty. After the school 'mela' she would start cleaning up the litter before asking anyone else to do it. This helped inculcate an understanding that no job (cleaning toilets included) is too dirty or 'low' for you to do. I felt free to go up to her and ask her a question or voice my concerns about something going on at school. A principal should be a friend and confidant to teachers and students if possible, but this should be balanced with her responsibilities. She should be able to keep things going without becoming autocratic. To keep things in order, a principal has to be deeply involved in the day to day running of the school as well as student-teacher and teacher-student dynamics. With involvement, she can develop an understanding of the context of problems that may arise. I believe that it is essential for the principal to take at least one class.

Experience in teaching will help her understand other teachers' difficulties if and when they arise. Some of my fondest memories of school are of innovative biology,

chemistry, physics and mathematics classes (to name a few) all taught by the principal! Each teacher had her own personality and teaching style and my perception of a principal when I was younger was

simply a teacher with that title who worked in the office a bit. She inspired me in so many ways over the eight or nine years I spent at that school. It was through her that I discovered and rediscovered bird watching, nature walks and tree climbing. She had a great sense of fun and although she sometimes scolded I suspect that she really wasn't as stern as she wanted us to believe.



*A principal should be a friend and confidant to teachers and students if possible, but this should be balanced with her responsibilities. She should be able to keep things going without becoming autocratic.*



The students, teachers and principal of any school should share mutual respect and be on relatively equal footing. Smaller classes will make this more probable. Equality or at least a sense of it is vital. If individuals feel that they have a say in what affects them, they will probably feel less threatened by any change put into practice. This 'power' should be tangible and if someone, be it a student or a teacher, is unhappy with the way something is happening she should be free to express this concern to the head of the institution and should be able to actually DO something about it.

There should be a certain amount accountability and transparency in any school. This should start with the principal. Schools could be more democratic, this would not only expose the students to the democratic process and its importance, but would also help things run more smoothly and it would probably be better for everyone in the

long run. Rules can be discussed and decided upon by the student body and teachers. If the students are used to this process and have sufficient maturity, they will understand the importance of rules and may not even require very many! But the existing boundaries should be made clear. Democracy can ease the tension that is known to build up between faculty members, students and other individuals involved. Although it comes with its own share of problems, democracy can do wonders for an institution provided individuals remain fair and unbiased. We must not let corruption settle in. As I mentioned earlier, there should be some degree of transparency and petty personal differences shouldn't get in the way. Straightforwardness, maturity and honesty are integral.

Finally, the principal and financial administration should have integrity and should most definitely put the good of the student, school and society before monetary gain. She

should seek admissions from those who share the school's vision and should avoid favoring anyone unfairly. The idea of a school running for profit seems misguided. The main purpose of a school and its principal should be to make the best possible education available to its students. Student and teacher development should be a principal's foremost concerns. The focus should be on what is best for the students.

In conclusion, the ideal principal is embodied by different ideals and individuals for each school and she should be intimately involved in the school's proceedings as well as in the interpersonal dynamics of the community. The head of an institution should be a true member of the school community and should give all other members equal respect. The needs of schools can be extremely different and usually change continuously. This simple fact makes defining the perfect or ideal principal a slippery task, to say the least.

---

**Jayanthi Joseph** is in eleventh grade and studies at Mallya Aditi International School. She studied at Poorna Learning Centre from fourth to tenth standard. She discovered her love for teaching while assisting with Biology classes at Poorna. A passionate musician, she plays the violin and piano and is part of the Bangalore School of Music's junior and chamber orchestras. She has taken part in several concert tours with the BSM chamber orchestra, including trips to Goa and Chennai. She hopes to pursue a career in music, biological research and education. She may be reached at [jj.iris.oregon@gmail.com](mailto:jj.iris.oregon@gmail.com).



Rajni Dwivedi

School! Whenever I think of my schooldays, I end up remembering my friends - playing with them, making mischief and the simple pleasure and joy of being with them. I also think of the teachers who taught me, books in the library, reading and writing, games and sports and so much more. Like many, childhood and school are part of my fondest and clearest memories. I have similar fond memories of a lot of teachers from my later school and college years. This perhaps is true too for many of us. But for me, when I think of school, the most striking thing that I remember is the Principal or Principal Sir, as we used to call him.

My friends and I were engaged in studies and the various other activities that I mentioned above. We had a lot of space and freedom. We could talk to our teachers and many times do whatever pleased us.

Then one day we saw a new unknown person walking in the corridors of the school. We wondered who he was. He did not look like a parent and he was not a teacher that we knew. But he did not appear to be impressive or formidable in any way and was just like any other adult moving around the corridors of the school.

We, of course, briefly discussed him amongst ourselves, did not reach any conclusion and then forgot about him. It was not for us to be curious for too long because we had many other exciting things to do. But in the assembly next morning, our Head Madam introduced him to all of us and said he was our new Principal. Our previous principal had retired over six months ago but our notion of a Principal was still based on him. So we carried that image in our head and

*Everybody felt that they knew him personally and that he was very fond of them. In fact, often children walking out of the classes after the final bell would find him waiting and he would strike up a conversation about various things and their experiences in the school.*

did not anticipate a close relationship with the new principal.

We slowly got to know more about our new Principal. As we would go around our routine in school, we seemed to run into him here and there. In the beginning we thought, *Oh! The Principal is coming, let us move aside. He must be a busy person and must have many things on his mind. He has no time to waste on us. There is nothing that he needs us for and there is nothing that he would want to talk to us about.* We were surprised that whenever he encountered us he would stop and talk. This did not happen once or twice but almost regularly. Sometimes he would stop us in the morning assembly; talk to us in the playgrounds. He always had time to talk to us; he seemed to have nothing more important to do. We would often see him walking towards the hostel to see how things were and chat with children on the way. Soon I realized that it was not only a few of us to whom he was talking but to all the children. Everybody felt that they knew him personally and that he was very fond of them. In fact, often children walking out of the classes after the final bell would find him waiting and he would strike up a conversation about various things and their experiences in the school. He would talk about us, what we were thinking about, our dreams and ask us how were we in class, what our fears were, our favorite subjects and so on. He would also crack jokes on the current political and social situation. He nurtured our interest in sports and would ask us what we thought the chances of Indian football team were? He seemed to try and distance us from cricket and take an interest in other sports. Very unlike the Principal of the school; certainly not to the notion of the Principal that we had in our heads.

The initial fear and hesitation that we had in talking to him slowly disappeared as conversations became natural and we wanted him to find us and talk. Still we tried to avoid him when we had committed a mistake or broken a rule. We would feel that since we had made a mistake then there would be some kind of punishment and we would feel embarrassed and criticized. We were used to being scolded



or fined. When we had developed what we thought was a friendship with him, we were not worried. We thought that now there would be no punishment but that was not so. He was very strict on pointing out mistakes. But his punishment was unusual. The person had to either clean her classroom, a part of the school ground or wash utensils in the mess. Many children pleaded, "Please Sir, fine us instead. We will not do it again." He did not agree and said "*You do not pay the fine, your parents pay it. You were at fault so you have to pay. Since this is a mistake you have made so you should also take punishment*".

Slowly a few things in the school seemed different because of him. All of us and the teachers became extremely punctual, all classes were held and they started on time, and why not. He was always there in the school before anyone else and was the last to leave. He knew everything about the school. What is where, what is happening - when and where, who is responsible for what and needs what kind of help. He not only knew all that but also knew how to organize support and make people feel valuable and helped.

What are the responsibilities of a Principal? He had a full sense of this, what the school, teachers and his students needed and wanted, and he had the ability and the tenacity to battle with any one for getting them their rights. If he wanted he could have created hierarchy in the school as a Principal is authorized to take all kinds of decisions but he did not do that. He had a friendly and natural relationship and interaction with not only children, teachers, parents of children but with everyone else in the school as well. He was very firm and not at all a person to let insincerity and lack of commitment go. But his manner of intervention was so

different and fresh that you did not feel that you have been pulled up for not being up to the mark. You only felt advised, applauded and encouraged to do better.

One more thing about him, he was extremely energetic and quick. He would be seen here and the next moment at another place. He had everything on his finger tips. He was a quick decision maker and took steps needed for development of the school. As I am writing this I am not only remembering all that I experienced with him but am also analyzing it, but when as children we talked about him we only said "our Sir is fantastic".

I am not sure of the category of Principals - where you would place him in this category and what characteristics you can extract as features of a good Principal. It is, however, clear that we felt very open and comfortable. Everything seemed to be a bit smoother and we felt we had greater freedom even though we could not play truant or play as many pranks. It was clear he had a lot to do with it and teachers did look up to him. He was their leader. I still wonder if he was able to do all this and affect almost everyone positively. Was he merely charismatic or there was a method to what he did and hence we can derive principles from what he did.

I often think that in our discussions on Principals and of school adult leadership we forget the perspective of the students and how they perceive that person. I have known some very well run and managed schools but by leaders who were formal, distant and in a sense formidable. This particular person remains fresh as he was near us. I am also not sure if all other adults saw him as we did and if what he did made the school the best possible but for us he would remain an inspiration and a friend.

---

**Rajni Dwivedi** is presently working with Chattisgarh Education Resource Center (a collaborate organization of Vidya Bhawan Society). During her experience of 6 years in the field of education, she has mainly worked in the area of teacher training and textbook development with various state teams in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Rajasthan. She may be contacted at [rajni@vidyabhawan.org](mailto:rajni@vidyabhawan.org).





'Come, climb up on this chair,'  
One day, Life said unto me,  
'And, while you are up there,  
Look around and oversee.'

'It is perhaps way too high,  
I regret I'm not so tall,  
Gingerly I shall try,  
But I fear that I may fall!'

Though it heard my words of doubt,  
Life did not in any way falter,  
Instead it reached all out,  
My Fear into Hope to alter.

With beauty to meet the eye,  
And warmth and goodness, too,  
The chair that seemed so high  
Moved down a notch or two.

Yet there was something strange  
In the way the chair would slip  
And its height would often change  
Sometimes, I'd even trip!

As soon as I would think  
That the chair was feeling easy,  
Its legs would start to sink  
And turn my stomach queasy.

Often, as I got off the chair,  
Almost everyone around,  
Would put me right back there,  
And then question my ground.

'How can you talk to us thus?  
'From above, how can you tower?  
'We thought you were one of us,  
Are you coming down from power?'

'No, no!' I'd hasten to reassure,  
'I really mean you well,  
But whoever this chair secures,  
Will ask: and you must tell!'

'That isn't what we're used to,'  
The answer shone through a glare,  
'We can only work with you,  
If you come down from this chair.'

So scamper down I would,  
In all haste and ready cheer,  
Then find things weren't so good,  
As all order would disappear.

With untiring patience and zeal,  
To my chair I would return,  
And speak so as to appeal,  
But I would try not to be stern.

A frown, a shrug, a glare,  
Would make the chair seem higher,  
So as soon as I was aware,  
I would push aside my ire.

It became an exercise steady,  
I was in an eternal gym,  
My inner muscles got ready,  
My temper: it got slim!

Yet, a slip in word or tone,  
At the end of a tiring day,  
Would do the work alone,  
Of washing all my effort away.

'She's tough and harsh and rude,'  
The winds would blithely sing,  
'Why must we bear her moods?  
Why must she hardness bring?'

'Soft and gentle is our grass,  
Hurt not our feelings bare,  
If at all this way you pass,  
Speak only when you care.

'We will not give unto you,  
What you ask from your chair,  
For we have feelings, too,  
Of which you'd better beware!

'Our feelings to you must matter,  
Show us tender, loving care,  
Then perhaps we will gather,  
Guardedly around your chair.

'But should you hurt us once,  
With your look or word or tone,  
We will upon you pounce,  
By leaving you well alone.

'You will not hear our laughter,  
You may not see our smile,  
We hope that therein after,  
You will watch and wait awhile.'

So I'd watch and take my place,  
In the hope that therein after,  
By slowing down my pace,  
There would be peace and laughter.

But then the chair would call,  
For me to oversee,  
If two persons could work at all,  
In peaceful harmony.

To set their swords aside,  
And help them meet each other,  
Upon the chair, astride,  
I'd sit and be their mother.

So you see, I was off and on,  
This chair that stood so high,  
And now I am so far gone,  
As to leave it high and dry.

Not a single one knows  
How hard I tried to fit,  
Yet my patience, as it grows,  
Says it matters not a bit.

For, as Life is always wise,  
What does a high chair hold?  
With ardour, I have tried,  
Now let the truth be told.

• • •

**Neeraja Raghavan** is a consultant with Academics and Pedagogy team of Azim Premji University Resource Center, Bangalore. She composed this poem when she decided to end a two-year stint at being Vice Principal and then Principal of a residential school. Since she found that administration work was not quite her cup of tea, she switched to being an educational consultant and free lance writer, which is what she continues to do now, based in Bangalore. She can be reached at [neeraja@azimpremjifoundation.org](mailto:neeraja@azimpremjifoundation.org).



Sometimes my mind wanders back in time to joyful memories of attending a great school led by an inspiring head mistress. Lady Sivaswamy Ayyar Girls Higher Secondary School, Mylapore was where I did my class 6 to 12th. Normal school days, sports days, exhibitions, seva sangam activities, mid-day meals, medical camps, school annual days, competitions, dedicated teachers and to top these memories are those of my headmistress Sathyabama teacher.

To me my headmistress was very special. We used to long for her classes. When I was in class 10, she taught us an English poem. She came only twice that year and could complete only one poem. Both her classes were very lively, explaining to us each and every word, giving practical examples. I still remember her explaining the difference between childish and child-like, asking us what we would like to be called – Childish or child-like ? That particular class exceeded 40 minutes and the entire corridor was quiet as none would dare make noise as the headmistress was still taking class during lunch time. There was silence, not because of fear but out of respect.

Every Monday we used to have a flag hoisting event and each class would take turns to hoist the National Flag. One Monday, it was the turn of our class and we sang the National Anthem with mistakes. She politely stopped us, told us the meaning and encouraged us to sing again with passion and without mistakes.

#### Editor's Note:

This is a tribute to Ms. Sathyabhama, Principal of Lady Sivaswamy Ayyar Girls Higher Secondary School, Mylapore, of which the author was a student.



There was no corporal punishment in our school those days. We were taught moral values through lovely stories during moral science period. We had Blue Cross, Red Cross and Seva Sangam units, each of which groomed students for life in different ways.

Her pleasant and smiling face, tidy cotton saris she wore and her simplicity continues to inspire! I have seen her traveling by the city bus most of the time. I am proud to say that all my friends are well settled in life because of the great school and the wonderful headmistress we had. To this day, I don't think I have ever come across such a fine human being and inspiring teacher in my life.

**These memories kindle in me the same joy that William Wordsworth paints in his Daffodils:**

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
 In vacant or in pensive mood,  
 They flash upon that inward eye  
 Which is the bliss of solitude;  
 And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
 And dances with the daffodils.



**A**s I sit down to pen my thoughts on the milestones of my life in the past two decades I go into flashback mode and lots of feelings and thoughts come to me. What are these? I have experienced many joys and sorrows, hope and hopelessness, frustration and excitement and more such contrasting feelings. Experiences have been even more varied and with each new experience I went through different rides, some smooth, some rough and some like a steep rollercoaster. I would like to share my learning in a few areas.

### Roll Back ...

1990 – the start of my teaching career! It makes me happy that there has been no looking back ever since.

2003 – opportunity to head a school with 2000+ students followed by my present innings since 2+ years as the head of an alternative school, Poorna in Bangalore.

Between 1990 and 2003 I had the opportunity of teaching in schools in Delhi, Kolkata and Bangalore; alongside I have also been a teacher trainer. As a teacher I had always enjoyed additional administrative responsibilities like managing the examination department, handling all outbound educational trips, being in charge of a house and the like. Presently, in addition to my full time responsibilities at Poorna, I have been visiting a few schools across the country as a soft-skills trainer.

Having worked in 5 schools, I have discovered that there are as many similarities as uniqueness in the schools across the country. The dynamics of human relationships, interactions among all the stakeholders (children, parents, teachers and management) and issues are much the same. Yet, each institution is unique – thanks to the individuality of each person, be it the teacher, the student, the parent or a member of the management. In this article I would like to share my experiences in three areas – from teacher to manager, keeping pace with technological developments and moving from conventional system to an alternate system.

### Moving From Teacher To Manager

Having been a teacher-trainer for a few years, I started exploring the possibility of getting into academic administration. When I took on the responsibility of heading an institution with 2000 children and 150 staff members I

had very little idea of what was in store for me. Today, as I look back, I realize that as a principal there are numerous wide-ranging tasks and duties to perform.



- **T a k i n g responsibility for just not my actions but the actions of my team.**

There is no scope for complaining about anyone – it is very necessary that any issue be settled first and later go into the details of what went wrong.

I have stopped being defensive about my actions; I now listen to feedback, especially the not-so-nice feedback as this is what makes the institution grow. As they say in the corporate world, a complaining customer is far better than a silent one! Critical feedback certainly gives a lot of food for thought and lots more to do.

- **Delegating versus doing** - Often, I had felt, it is easier to complete a given work rather than delegate it to a colleague. As I look back over the last 7+ years the experience has been varied and enriching. I remember staying up late in the night completing the records for a Sports Meet. Slowly I realised that I must delegate responsibility, provide the required resources and ensure that the work is done!!

I have also learnt that all of us need to be given new opportunities, trusted and made part of the decision making process. This is much like parenting! I also realise that there is not enough time to do everything! A huge self-learning (a work still in progress) is not to micro manage; instead learn to coach from the side and then takes things in stride.

- **Being responsible and setting the direction for self and team** – In this role one has to take decisions that could be unpleasant to the team. Initially I would feel discouraged when there would be opposition to implementing new policies or ideas. One great satisfaction has been to convince my team on the importance of documentation. The teaching community does lots of work and we do not like to record what we do!

The other ongoing responsibilities are about how to determine policies or plans that are good for the institution, implementing unpopular decisions, recruiting staff, handling concerns of parents and staff, communicating sad news, taking risks with some ideas or policies.

Frank and regular dialogue with team members has helped me understand the team better and make it easier to tide over difficult decisions.

Trying to be perfect is stressful, I soon discovered! Adopting and accepting the 90-10 principle (allowing for 10% error) has made life easier and enjoyable.

### Keeping Pace With Technological Developments

“Classes would be fun if lessons can be made exciting – much like the games we play on the computer or on the mobile phones.” This is a remark I have heard more than once. It was this comment that made me move out of my comfort zone, learn the use of MS Office, browse the internet to get current information and also become a teacher trainer in technology aided learning! Using the computer and projector now and then certainly adds some fun in the class.

Technology pervades all dimensions of our lives. Some of us are very comfortable using the various gadgets that are introduced in the market ever so often! It has been a pleasure to have upgraded the use of technology at school. The areas that we have addressed these needs are:

- Technology in the classroom - the computer, LCD projector, camera - these gadgets are useful aids (though not always necessary) in teaching and we are using these as and when they complement our effort. We see educational CDs, movie clippings to start a debate on social or environmental issues, understand how electricity is generated, understand complex concepts and much more!
- Technology in administration – Documentation of school records: student records, computation of marks, copies of student reports, staff data, staying in touch with all stakeholders through email/sms and more. Technology has certainly helped in reducing the use of paper and effectively storing records of many years.
- Technology used by children - One day I was speaking with the 13-14 year-olds on how one can chance upon pornography sites when browsing for information and

one child said that he actually visited the sites and cleared the 'History' of the web browser so his parents would not know! I realised then that I am quite behind the teenagers on the knowledge of the many features available in information technology.

There are new generations of mobile phones, itouches, play stations, smart phones etc., coming every few months. The best way to learn about them, I have discovered, is to discuss these with the children. This way I stay abreast with what the teenagers are doing today: whether it is the games they play, the features on the various mobile phones or the latest happenings on Facebook! In fact, many of my colleagues and I signed up on Facebook to understand why children enjoy that network site; incidentally I have also reconnected with many of my school and college friends!

We often have discussions, amongst staff and with children, on how we can use technology to our advantage and be aware of the dangers we may be getting into.

*Trying to be perfect is stressful, I soon discovered! Adopting and accepting the 90-10 principle (allowing for 10% error) has made life easier and enjoyable.*

### Moving To An Alternative School

Presently I am working at Poorna ([www.poorna.in](http://www.poorna.in)), an alternative school located in North Bangalore. Poorna started as a home school. Indira Vijaysimha had decided, in 1993 to homeschool her children. Some of her friends requested Indira to teach their children and also helped take on the responsibility of teaching the children. Thus Poorna was born and today we have a hundred children and twenty staff members!

The shift to Poorna has opened up new experiences for me. I like it that here it is our endeavour to have a community that is a representation of society. Also, we make a conscious effort to include all cross sections of society – parents from various socio economic backgrounds, children with specific learning

disabilities, first generation learners along with children who have tremendous opportunities and exposure, ranging from art to environmental issues to scientific research. We staff members, too, come from diverse backgrounds – teachers, farmers, engineers, artistes, scientists - all who have made a choice to work with children. We are a community where children, parents and teachers are learning from each other all the time. Parents volunteer in the areas of their expertise; children explore and learn about the world around them through walks and excursions.

Exchange of numerous ideas from various perspectives has enriched my learning. I really enjoy our morning assembly when we discuss wide range of topics of sports, art, politics, environmental issues, social causes – I realized that I now

*I have discovered that communicating and keeping open all channels of communication is very, very essential for personal, professional and institutional growth. It gives me pleasure that I have learnt to put aside my ego and have direct and open communication when a difference or clash of interests takes place.*

listen to students differently!

Vertical grouping was another new concept for me - Children are grouped vertically and the groups are named by a theme chosen by the students; the themes change every year – this year it is endangered species and we have the tigers, white rhinos, red pandas and more! The groups are fluid groups where children move from one group to another according to their academic and emotional readiness.

Our alumni have been doing good work and excelling in their chosen fields – educational eco tourism, sports, automobile design, fine arts, performing arts, Sanskrit studies, event management, alternative medicine, teaching and research.

For a casual visitor we look like a large, joint family/ community. There are challenges here, too.

- Prospective parents visit us and are sometimes unsure of whether our system will work in the real world. I have found it useful to introduce them to our alumni and have them interact with our students. Those who are convinced admit their children at our school. Sometimes parents, who believed in such a system, suddenly start wondering if their child will be able to face the world outside the safe environs of the school. Once again, dialogue and interaction with our present students and alumni helps.
- We have relatively few schools that follow alternative methods and most of the teachers who come with experience are teachers who have not worked in such a set-up. It takes a year or two for us to understand the teaching-learning process here. Our system has no laid down rules to refer to and while we welcome diversity we also have to be very careful that members who join our community understand our beliefs and have similar beliefs.
- Children who join us midstream suddenly discover freedom of expression and it takes them a while to retune themselves to a life of implicit discipline. As we do not believe in punishment it is common that new students do not do follow-up work at home. It takes us a lot of discussion, without sermonising, for students to understand the importance of regular work in the absence of imposed punishment or fear.

In the years I have been at Poorna I have learnt humility and questioned some of my beliefs: for example, a formal relationship with children and the teacher being superior to students. Students at Poorna feel free to question what they disagree with, address issues and resolve conflicts directly; the same applies to adults, too. We agree to disagree and are open to feedback and suggestions from one and all. We are also comfortable giving our feedback to others. A colleague shared that her husband had remarked, "After you have joined Poorna you are able to ask for your rights!"

I have discovered that communicating and keeping open all channels of communication is very, very essential for personal, professional and institutional growth. It gives me pleasure that I have learnt to put aside my ego and have direct and open communication when a difference or clash of interests takes place.

In conclusion I would like to state that these and other

experiences as a principal have humbled me; while I still have lots more to learn I also feel happy that I have done my

best and hope to continue learning, growing and contributing in the years to come.

---

**Renu** currently heads Poorna, an alternate school in Bangalore. Having taught students and facilitated teacher-training in different schools, in different parts of India, she has had an opportunity to observe the similarities and differences in schools across some parts of India. She is also a volunteer counsellor at a counselling centre in Bangalore. She enjoys travelling and meeting people. She may be contacted at [renusrinivasan@yahoo.com](mailto:renusrinivasan@yahoo.com).





Section D

---

**Resource Kit**

## A. Professional Associations

- <http://www.aasa.org/> - **American Association of School Administrators**
- <http://www.ascd.org/> - **Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development**
- <http://www.icponline.org/> - **International Confederation of Principals**
- <http://www.naesp.org/> - **National Association of Elementary School Principals**
- <http://www.nassp.org/> - **NASSP National Assoc. of Secondary School Principals**
- <http://www.iel.org/> - **Institute for Educational Leadership**
- <http://www.nea.org/> - **National Education Association**
- <http://www.principals.org/> - **National Association of Secondary School Principals**
- <http://www.aft.org/> - **American Federation of Teachers**
- <http://www.nsba.org/> - **National School Boards Association**
- <http://www.icponline.org/> - **International Confederation of Principals**
- <http://www.nafsa.org/> - **Association of International Educators**
- <http://www.ascl.org.uk/> - **The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)** -
- <http://www.psba.org/> - **Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA)**

## B. Resources

- **The Wallace Foundation** - <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/Pages/default.aspx>
- **Rand Corporation** - <http://www.rand.org/>
- **National Academy foundation** - <http://naf.org/>
- **CASE : Council for Advancement and Support of Education** - <http://www.case.org/>
- **BISW : British International Schools Worldwide** - <http://www.bisw.org/>
- **ISQ International Ltd** - <http://www.isqi.org.uk/>
- **Training and Development Agency for Schools** - <http://www.tda.gov.uk/>
- **Center for Development and Learning** - <http://www.cdl.org/who-we-are/Who%20we%20are.html>
- **Stanford Educational Leadership Institute (SELI)** - <http://seli.stanford.edu/>

### C. Web links

- Michael Fullan. The Change Leader. [http://www.cdl.org/resource-library/articles/change\\_ldr.php](http://www.cdl.org/resource-library/articles/change_ldr.php)
- Michael Fullan. The Role of Leadership in the Promotion of Knowledge Management in Schools
- <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/46/43/2074954.pdf>
- David J Kirk and Terry L Jones. Assessment Report on Effective Schools. Pearson Education Inc. July 2004.
- [http://www.pearsonassessments.com/NR/rdonlyres/AE0CB466-32E1-4CDD-8B64-11A595251F7A/0/Effective-Schools\\_Final.pdf](http://www.pearsonassessments.com/NR/rdonlyres/AE0CB466-32E1-4CDD-8B64-11A595251F7A/0/Effective-Schools_Final.pdf)
- Dr. K Pushpanadham. Educational Leadership for School based Management. ABAC Journal Vol. 26, No. 1 (January - April, 2006, pp. 41 - 48). [http://www.journal.au.edu/abac\\_journal/2006/jan06/vol26no1\\_article04.pdf](http://www.journal.au.edu/abac_journal/2006/jan06/vol26no1_article04.pdf)
- Leadership, School Effectiveness and Staff Professional Development: The Case Study of a School in Uganda by Dr. Jaya Earnest, Paper submitted for presentation at the 2004 Annual conference for the Australian Association for Research in Education, Melbourne.
- <http://www.aare.edu.au/04pap/ear04330.pdf>
- Leadership Matters – leadership capabilities for Education Queensland Principals by Department of Education and Arts, Queensland Government, March 2006. [education.qld.gov.au/staff/.../docs/leadershipmatterstechpaper.doc](http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/.../docs/leadershipmatterstechpaper.doc)
- Leading Educational Change: Reflections on the Practice of Instructional and Transformational Leadership by Philip Hallinger, Cambridge Journal of Education, Vol. 33, No. 3, November 2003 <http://www.philiphallinger.com/papers/CCJE%20Instr%20and%20Trans%20Lship%202003.pdf>
- Standards for School Leaders by Connecticut State Department of Education, 1999. [http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/EducatorStandards/standards\\_for\\_school\\_ldrs.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/EducatorStandards/standards_for_school_ldrs.pdf)
- Statewide Framework for Internship Programs for School Leaders <http://www.ade.state.az.us/certification/downloads/StatewideFrameworkStateBoardApproved.pdf>
- School Leaders: Changing Roles and Impact on Teacher and School Effectiveness, by Bill Mulford, April 2003. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/61/61/2635399.pdf>
- Strong Leaders Strong Schools: 2009 State Laws by Sara Shelton. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/Knowledge-Center/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/EducationLeadership/Documents/NCSL-Strong-Leaders-Strong-Schools-2009.pdf>

### D. Books

- Thomas J. Sergiovanni. Strengthening the Heartbeat: Leading and Learning Together in Schools. Jossey-Bass (August 13, 2004)
- Gordon A. Donaldson. Cultivating Leadership in Schools: Connecting People, Purpose, & Practice. Teachers College Press; 2 edition (June 30, 2006)

- Thomas Stapleford. In *Dispute: Conflict Resolution for School Leaders*. AuthorHouse (September 4, 2007)
- Michael Fullan. *The Challenge of Change: Start School Improvement Now!* Corwin Press; Second Edition (April 9, 2009)
- Dougals B. Reeves. *Reframing Teacher Leadership to Improve Your School*. ASCD (May 30, 2008)
- Carl D. Glickman. *SuperVision and Instructional Leadership: A Developmental Approach* (8th Edition). Prentice Hall; 8th edition (March 29, 2009)
- James P. Spillane. *Distributed Leadership*. (Jossey-Bass Leadership Library in Education) Jossey-Bass (January 30, 2006)
- Robert J. Marzano. *School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results*.
- Association for Supervision & Curriculum Deve (September 30, 2005)
- Michael Fullan. *Leading in a Culture of Change*. Jossey-Bass; Revised edition (February 2, 2007)
- Michael Fullan. *The New Meaning of Educational Change, Fourth Edition*. Teachers College Press; 4 edition (March 9, 2007)
- Terrence E. Deal. *Shaping School Culture: Pitfalls, Paradoxes, and Promises*. Jossey-Bass; 2 edition (March 3, 2009)
- Building a New Structure for School Leadership. Washington, DC: The Albert Shanker Institute.
- Fink, E. & Resnick, L. (2001). *Developing Principals as Instructional Leaders*. Phi Delta
- Kappan. V. 82. pp 598-606.
- Goleman, D. Boyatzis, R., McKee, A. (2002). *Primal Leadership*. Boston, MA: Harvard
- Business School Press.
- Hargreaves, A. (in press). *Teaching in the Knowledge Society*. New York: Teachers College
- Press.
- The Hay Group, (1999). *Excellence in School Leadership*. Victoria, Australia: Department of
- Education, Employment & Training.
- Richard F Elmore. *Building a New Structure for School Leadership*. Albert Shanker Institute, Washington DC, 2000.
- Alma Harris et al. *Effective Leadership for School Improvement*. London, Routledge: 2003.
- Marianne Coleman. *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*. London: Sage Publications, 2002.
- Gerald Rupert Grace. *School Leadership: Beyond Education Management: An Essay in Policy Scholarship*. UK and USA, Falmer Press, 1995.
- Stephen Davis et al. *School Leadership Study: Developing Successful Principals*. Stanford Educational Leadership Institute (SELI), 2005.
- Thomas J. Sergiovanni. *Leadership for the Schoolhouse: How Is It Different? Why Is It Important?* Jossey-Bass, 2000.





A Newsletter from  
Azim Premji Foundation

#134, Doddakannelli, Next to Wipro Corporate Office, Sarjapur Road, Bangalore - 560 035, India  
Tel : 91 - 80 - 6614900/01/02 Fax : 91 - 80 - 66144903 E-mail : [learningcurve@azimpremjifoundation.org](mailto:learningcurve@azimpremjifoundation.org)  
Website : [www.azimpremjifoundation.org](http://www.azimpremjifoundation.org)

Also visit Azim Premji University website at [www.azimprejiversity.edu.in](http://www.azimprejiversity.edu.in)