

Report on One-Day Seminar
On
Exploring Improvement in Elementary Schools

A one-day seminar on “Exploring Improvement in Elementary Schools” was organized at the conference room on Wednesday, 21st April 2010 at National University for Education, Planning and Administration (NUEPA), New Delhi. Prof. R. Govinda, Vice-Chancellor of NUEPA, welcomes the participants and introduced the programme to all. The seminar was chaired by Shri Anil Bordia. Findings of three recent studies were presented – Revisiting the Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE), Practichi Education Report-II and Revisiting Schools in Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh done by CREATE.

(i) Revisiting ‘Public Report on Basic Education’ (PROBE) by Ms Meera Samson

Meera Samson informed the gathering that Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) survey was carried out in 1996 in Rajasthan and undivided Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. The same States and regions were revisited in 2006, largely the same villages, to find out what had changed in the delivery of basic education over the decade.

Comparing the findings of the two surveys, it was pointed out that much had not changed from the first survey – half of the government schools have no teaching activity and classroom-activity levels have not seen any improved. Though, some positive changes have taken place over the past decade, firstly, school participation has improved dramatically, as compare to 20% of children in the 6-12 age group were out of school in 1996. In 2006, hardly 5 per cent of such children were not enrolled in school. Secondly, stark social disparities in school enrolment have virtually disappeared at the primary level, whether it is the gap between boys and girls or that between children from different castes. Enrolment rates among Scheduled Caste children (94%) and Muslim children (95%). Enrolment among Scheduled Tribe children, however, was lower, at 89%. Thirdly, schooling infrastructure has expanded rapidly. The proportion of schools with at least two pucca rooms went up from 26% in 1996 to 84% in 2006. Nearly three-fourth of all schools now has drinking facilities. Toilets have been constructed in over 60% of all schools. Fourthly, provisions of school incentives have also increased. In 1996,

free uniforms were provided in only 10% of primary schools. But, by 2006, they were provided in more than half the schools. Similarly, in 1996, fewer than half the schools reported distribution of free textbooks. Now, almost all schools (99%) got the facility. Fifthly, school meals are also in place in most schools. By 2006, the dry ration scheme was operational in 63% of the primary schools. By 2006, the dry ration scheme had been replaced by hot, cooked meals.

She further reveals that during the last 10 years, there have been a mass appointment of local “contract teachers,” (shiksha karmis, shiksha mitras, para teachers, and so on) at salaries less than the permanent teachers in the same government schools. Forty percent of the teachers in government primary school are contract teachers. The survey also found that the majority of contract teachers were from the more privileged social groups. Reaffirming the need for community involvement in school management for greater teacher accountability, it was pointed out that under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, decentralized management was promoted through the setting up of different community organizations and committees, including village education committees (VECs), school monitoring committees (SMC’s) and school education committees (SECs). In fact, 96% of schools had such committees. The committees in many cases had worked to improve physical infrastructure in the school, select contract teachers and supervise midday meals. Again for private schools, it is widely assumed that they function better than government schools because they are accountable to the parents. Further, a privately managed school is fundamentally inequitable as schooling opportunities depend on one’s ability to pay. It also puts girls at a disadvantage: boys accounted for 74% off all children enrolled in private schools in the 2006 survey (compared with 51% of children enrolled in government schools). By perpetuating existing social inequalities private schooling defeats one of the main purposes of “universal elementary education” – breaking the old barriers of class, caste and gender in Indian society.

Ten years ago, The Public Report on Basic Education (“PROBE Report” based on the PROBE survey) highlighted Himachal Pradesh’s remarkable achievements in the field of elementary education. In 2006, it was found that 99% of all children in the age group of 6-12 years were enrolled.

(ii) The Practichi Education Report-II by Mr. Kumar Rana

Mr. Kumar Rana presented the Pratichi Education Report II representing the Pratichi (India) Trust. He begins the presentation by saying that the survey was conducted on the primary education in West Bengal, conducted in 2001 and 2002 in two phases. In the initial survey, it was found that the proportion of children taking private tuitions was 57% for the primary schools and 24% for the Shikshu Siksha Kendras (SSKs-schools established by the Panchayat and Rural Development Department, Government of West Bengal, in areas with difficulty of access to schools-inhabited mainly by SC, ST and Muslims). In the study carried out in the same areas in 2008-2009, on which the Pratichi Education Report II is based, these figures were found to be 64% for primary schools and 58% for the SSKs. The above data indicates the worsening of the quality of schooling that forced the parents to send their children for private tuition. But the responses on the enquiries on schooling it was found that the quality of schooling has actually improved: while in 2001-2002 the proportion of parents who were “satisfied with teachers’ performance” were 52% and 70% for primary schools and SSKs respectively, whereas the corresponding figures in the present study are 64% and 75% respectively. It implies that the high aspiration of the parents about their children getting modern education, noticed in our earlier report, has strengthened manifold. This is validated by the increased rate of attendance: in 2001-02 the rates of attendance found were 58% and 64% respectively for primary schools and SSKs. The present study found that the figure was uniform at 75% in both cases.

Shedding light on a study on parental perception of quality that they carried out jointly with the Birbhum District Primary School Council, in 2008, he said, in schools where teaching and learning were much better and children could carry out their studies without private help, the parents insisted on private tuition as “the child would do even better.” Many of the teachers also thought that private tuition was essential, particularly, for the “first-generation learners.”

He concluded by emphasizing that to make the children of the traditionally underprivileged to come to school it has to be ensured that (a) they do not drop out in the middle, (b) they are provided with the fullest opportunity to get enrolled at higher classes, and (c) the quality of education is ensured in such a manner that the very concepts of home-task and private tuition at primary level are totally eradicated. After, guaranteeing the above issues it will

eradicate the various differences-social, geographical, gender and so on-that prevail in the planning and implementation of educational programmes.

(iii) Revisiting Schools in Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh by Prof. R. Govinda

Prof. R. Govinda presented the paper entitled “Exploring the Impact of Development Policies on Elementary School Education: Revisiting Schools in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh after 18 years”. He pointed out that in the area of interface between access and quality is what the paper attempts to explore through an empirical study of 88 schools located in three clusters –one cluster in Rajnandgaon district of Chhattisgarh and one cluster each in Rewa and Dindori districts of Madhya Pradesh.

Further, he explained that Rajnandgaon, Rewa and Dindori clusters, in that order present a development continuum in terms of general infrastructure as well as overall education development as reflected in literacy rates. In terms of literacy rates, Rajnandgaon cluster has an overall literacy rate of 71 percent, corresponding figure for Rewa cluster is 66 per cent and it is as low as 37 percent for Dindori. The study has shown that the numbers of schools have increased. But with the school expansion programmes it has not helped bridge equity gaps.

To answer the question whether schools have changed during last 18 years his study assessed (a) Physical Infrastructure (b) Availability of Teachers and their Training Status (and their Absenteeism); and (d) Learners participation and performance- in terms of Achievement Test results and Teachers Expectations. And found that there has been a perceptible improvement in infrastructure; other indicators including teacher provision, student absenteeism, learning achievement have not improved significantly.

Discussion

During the discussion session, monitoring teachers, teacher’s absenteeism, functioning of private schools, students’ attendance, decentralization etc. were raised to “Revisiting PROBE.” Some of the responses related with the above questions were discussed briefly. During the discussion it was pointed out that there was no positive impact for teacher-learning activity and parents were

not empowered to monitor the teachers. Since, head teacher is involved in the education committee. However, parents are aware of the changes in policy.

For the Practichi Education Report-II question were concerned with actual attendance were checked or not, community-learning achievement, impact of party politics on education, overload curriculum overload etc. On the methodology part, it was suggested that qualitative methods should supplement the data to bring out a clear picture on the quality of tuitions for different sections.

Lastly, questions on Revisiting Schools in Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh were confined on teacher absenteeism, silent exclusion, assessment of learning ability of the child, issues on repeater like reason for high repetition, personal information of the repeaters etc. During the discussion Madhumita Bandyopadhyay supplemented Prof R.Govinda's presentation. She commented that in 2010 a few changes were visible in some school during the school visits. In some schools teachers were appointed, two EGSs (Education Guarantee scheme) closed down, and student's absenteeism is still high in some of these schools. Though earlier district level officers informed about the improvement in retention, but still some cases of dropout were noticed in 2009-10. The main reason of students dropout is inability of access to schools and to malfunctioning of schools. Practice of issuing transfer certificate is going on at Rajnandgoan. Md. Moinuddin (project associate at CREATE) also presented a brief picture of the field experience of the three clusters of Rewa, Dindori and Rajnandgaon. He said that there was less infrastructure, teacher absenteeism etc. Again, Prof.Govinda informed that in 2010 schools were revisited in Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh for third time. This time data on child tracking and school roster has been done and hope that some of the answers to the question raised during the discussion can be found out or other new information may come to light.

Anil Bordia, chairperson of the session, commented that the social mapping has been done on 460 villages in Rajasthan. Taking a different view he said parents' statements that children were going to school were not acceptable and has to find out about the children's absence from school. The 2006 PROBE data have to develop methods to analyse and present it to the public soon. Emphasizing the need for more information he observed, 'more research and information from field is needed locally as far as possible.' On Practichi he maintained that the data is very informative and seems rigorous work has been done in the field. According to him, the sample used for NUEPA studies is very small but very informative. However, data have been

collected for all children living in villages and also for children enrolled in all 88 schools located in villages and since information about them also are available for three consecutive years, findings of this project will help in implementing RTE in many ways.



Prof. R. Govinda, Shri anil Bordia and Prof. Arun C Mehta



Delegates of the seminar included eminent experts



Delegates participating in discussion