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We hope you have enjoyed reading the first two issues of our newsletter, Kindle. We are pleased to bring to you the third issue.

The feature article is an account of a group of teachers whose personal initiative and commitment has resulted in the transformation of their school. The magnitude of the challenges confronting Indian education can be overwhelming – in this context, the sterling efforts of such individuals deserve both applause and inquiry.

Kantilal Parmar, a Cluster Resource Coordinator, who lives in the desolate salt plains of Gujarat, is featured in our second article. Another unsung hero, Kantilal is committed to the cause of improving the quality of education in his cluster. Although he is interested in the philosophical foundations of education, he is deeply connected to the real world. He ensures that learnings from training programmes are applied to the regular work that he does in the schools of Mavsari.

The third article examines the much-debated issue of high-stakes assessment, which is now part of education policy through the RTE Rules in Andhra Pradesh. The need for assessing children is undeniable. But a lot of thought needs to go into designing an effective framework for testing children and for holding teachers accountable for the performance of students.

From testing and measuring performance we move on to a more philosophical question - can everything be measured? In our eagerness to reduce all growth and progress to numbers, we forget that there are many important things that cannot be counted or measured. The article cautions us against wearing blinkers and ignoring indicators of well-being, happiness and freedom in our quest for statistical precision.

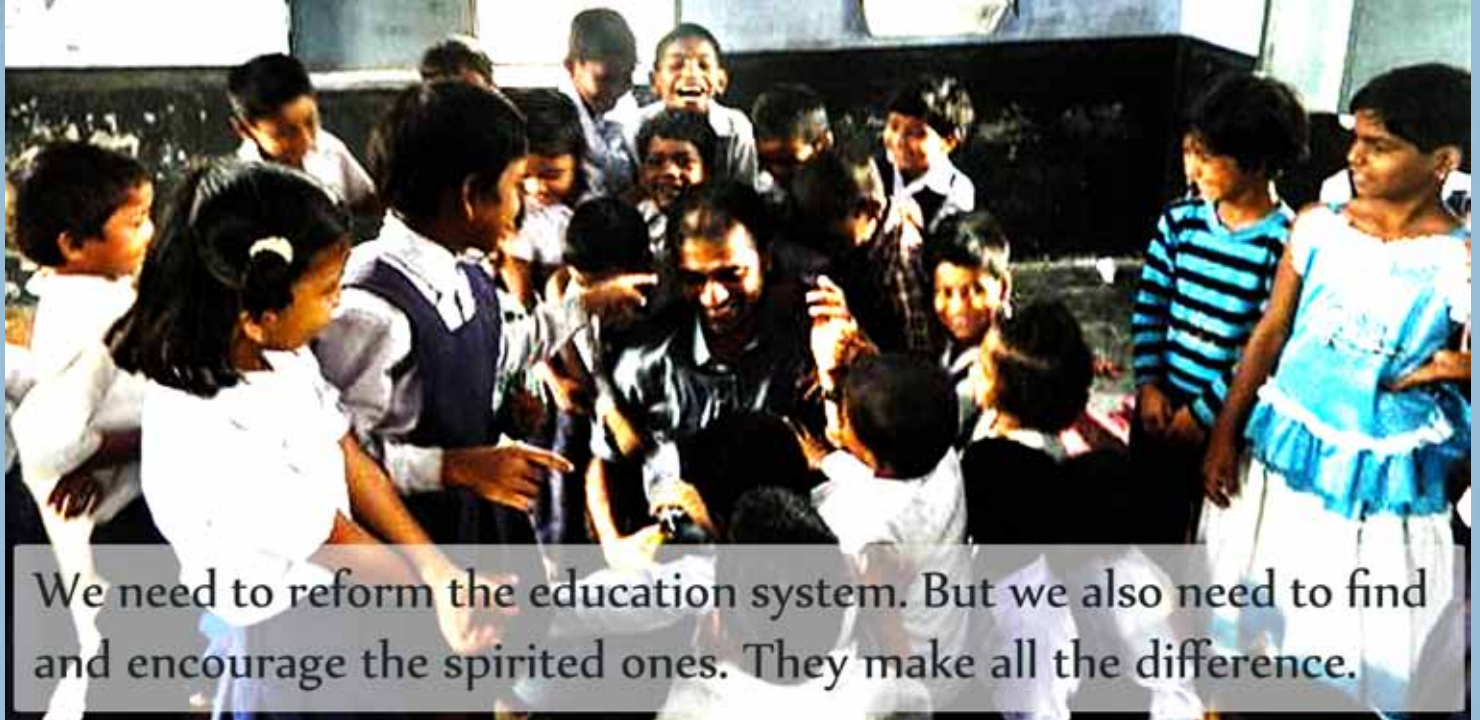
Our final article is from Addodagi in Karnataka - an inspiring story about how community participation and social pressure helped transform a government primary school in the area.

We hope you enjoy this issue of Kindle. Do send us your comments at kindle@azimpremjifoundation.org

Nilanjan Choudhury

MYSTERY OF NAGALA

ANURAG BEHAR



We need to reform the education system. But we also need to find and encourage the spirited ones. They make all the difference.

We walked in to the government primary school at Nagala, 15km from Rudrapur in Uttarakhand, at 8.30am. There was no one to receive us. We entered the first class room that we saw. There were 43 children. They were all engrossed in their work. There was no teacher in the class.

As Anant and I entered, the children looked at us curiously and started an excited conversation, from their art-work to reciting their favourite poem and story, and many things in between. In the last 10 minutes, I sat down in their midst, on the floor, as Anant recited a poem at their request.

The class retained the difficult balance between noise and silence; abuzz with curiosity and

excitement. There was a minor scuffle between two children, which was sorted out very quickly by the intervention of their neighbours.

Then we told them that we had to go. Nothing could have prepared me for their reaction. The kids jumped on me, as I sat on the floor. It was a heap of children on top of me. Like a football team's celebration after a stunning goal. They didn't want me to go.

They let me go after innumerable arguments, the one that seemed to convince them was that my daughter and son would be awaiting me in Bangalore. Those last 5 minutes were a loud fracas. It caught the attention of the teacher, wherever he was, and so he had come to the class. He was

standing at the door, watching with amusement.

That's how I first met Pradeep Pande. Soon I met the other teachers in the school, Ravi Mohan and Vinay Prabha. The principal of the school, Manju Bisht, was away on a short training. Together, this group runs this remarkable school.

The nature of the school is reflected partially in my experience there. The children are confident and curious. They are "self-disciplined" in the most positive sense of that word. They learn and do good work, often on their own. And they are happy. It's the kind of situation that we would like to see in all our (government and private) schools, but most often don't.

This school has the same constraints and frugal resources as the million other government schools. Its children come from the same disadvantaged, underprivileged groups. What then is the force propelling the mystery of the school at Nagala, which makes it so different?

We walked through the school. We saw the kitchen with a novel design for the chulahs, which packs the firewood outside the kitchen, leaving more space for movement and less fumes inside. This redesign was within the budget for the kitchen. When the government budget gave them money for two classrooms a few years ago, they persuaded the block officials to let them make a hall instead. It needs imagination and initiative, to get these seemingly small changes done in the government system.

It needed more than that, to do some of the other things that they have done in the school. They persuaded a local businessman to sponsor the salary of an additional teacher for a year. We saw the waterlogged backyard, across which the village community had built a raised brick path to reach the toilets. A construction contractor gave them the material for the steel gate to the school.

They described some of their academic issues and pedagogical methods. These were as creative and as practical as all their other actions. They are thoughtful, sensitive and sensible teachers—what we hope to see in all our classrooms. Their abilities and tenacity, were really at the heart of the remarkable classroom that we had encountered earlier—which was learning without a teacher. They had devised the system and the culture, so each class could run for some time on its own, because between three teachers they had to handle 300-odd children.

The answer to the mystery of the school at Nagala is in plain sight. It's the group that runs the school. It works in the same government school system, but the constraints and apathy of the system has never stopped the group. It persistently looks for spaces for manoeuvre within the system. It seeks and gets support within the government and the community.

We need continuing and massive systemic improvements in education, but we must not underestimate the importance and power of individuals taking initiative and changing things, within the space they have. I feel that we too often and too easily pass on everything to the "system", abdicating our responsibility in making change happen.

Kailash, one of my colleagues, one day found Pande shivering with high fever, under a blanket in the school office, the classes merrily going on without teachers. When asked, why was he in the school in that state, he said: "If I am here, the classes go on, so I might as well lie down here, instead of at home".

We need to reform the education system. But we also need to find and encourage the spirited ones. They make all the difference.

(The author works at Azim Premji Foundation)

Reprinted from Mint



4 kms north west is the vast desolate saline expanse of the Great Rann of Kutch. Three main languages are spoken here, Gujarati, Marwadi and Kutchi. There are various other languages spoken as is common in places near porous borders and having seasonal migratory populations.

The terrain here is tough. The land is arid and water scarce. The people are largely involved in cattle rearing and seasonal farming, when weather conditions permit. Small settlements are scattered over a large area, making access difficult, a problem exacerbated by the intermittent public transport in the area.

In this bleak backdrop, we met Kantilal Parmar. As a Cluster Resource Coordinator, he is responsible for organising training programmes for head teachers and teachers in his cluster. These trainings focus on academic discussions, demonstration sessions, expert guidance on specific issues and updating teachers on innovative pedagogical methods. Preparing and using high-quality teaching learning material is also a major focus area for Kantilal. His office is in the Cluster Resource Center at Mavsari and he ensures that it is well equipped with educational material like books, periodicals, letters, etc.

Shri Kantilal Parmar is the Cluster Resource Co-ordinator of Mavsari Cluster in Vav Block, Banaskantha district in Gujarat state.

Vav is the farthest block in Banaskantha to have a Block Resource Centre. 25 kms away is the Indo-Pak international border.

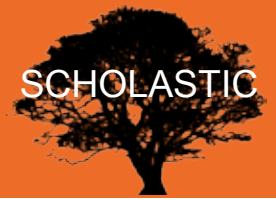
Apart from his official duties, Kantilal takes a keen interest in organising various sports and cultural competitions, exhibitions and fairs at the cluster level. Apart from the school community, he also ensures that the larger community participates in these fairs. Kantilal realises the importance of community involvement in ensuring regular school attendance by the students of his cluster, and therefore he regularly meets with parents, and tries to ensure their active involvement in the Praveshutsav, Balmelas, and community get-togethers. Kantilal has a deep thirst for knowledge and a desire to transmit this knowledge to the teachers and students of his block.

Kantilal, believes that his involvement with different government programmes over the last few years has helped him explore the nature of education in great depth. his views on education:

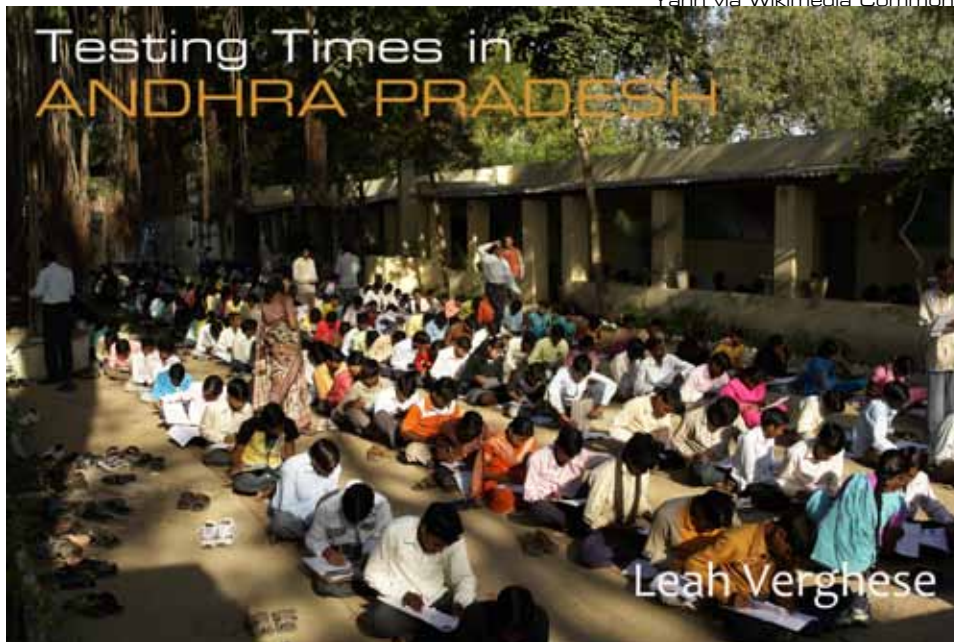
- The core purpose of primary education is to make the child a self-motivated and independent learner.
- Human beings have a right to decide for themselves and are duty bound to be responsible for their decisions
- Education should help people become autonomous and reasonable in their approaches.
- Individuals should be self sufficient and capable to fulfill their basic needs, above all else physical labor should be respected and carried out by all.
- The quality of leadership can be instilled through role modeling, which is where a teacher's role becomes important.

Recognising his out of the box thinking and openness to implementing new ideas, the Block Resource Co-ordinator approaches him regularly for several important assignments related to teaching and learning at the block level. He is often invited to be a training facilitator during the teacher training programmes held at the block level.

Kantilal stands tall as an inspiration and an example to others in the education space. In a system marked by laxity and indifference, initiatives by individuals like him give us hope that change is possible.
(The authors were part of the Learning Guarantee Program at Azim Premji Foundation)



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to grade-level proficiency in math and reading by 2014. If schools fail to make adequate yearly progress toward subject proficiency and graduation goals as defined by their respective states, NCLB requires schools and districts to take remedial action. Remedial action includes the opportunity for students to transfer to another, higher-performing school within the district, tutoring for students and in extreme cases, replacing school personnel or extending the school year.

The recent amendments to the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Rules in Andhra Pradesh show that history indeed repeats itself. The state government is embracing a model of high stakes assessment for schools that has proved to be ineffective in countries like the US. The Rules provide that at the end of the academic year, wherever the performance of children in a subject/class falls below 60% of the standards prescribed by the Academic Authority, the class teacher/subject teacher will be recommended by the local authority for penalty for committing a serious misconduct. If the performance of children in a subject/class, is above 90% of the standards prescribed by the Academic Authority, the class teacher/subject teacher will be recommended by the local authority concerned for the best teacher award at the district/state level.

The state government of Andhra Pradesh is on the verge of making the same mistakes that the No Child Left Behind Act in the US made through provisions like these. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act passed in the US in 2001 creates a similar accountability system. It mandates that schools make progress toward closing the achievement gap between rich and poor, black and white, on an annual basis, and bring all students

The NCLB-model accountability requirements of the Andhra Pradesh RTE Rules as they currently stand will impact schools in rural and poorer areas most adversely. The targets are defined as absolute levels of performance in tests, and are uniformly applied across the board to all schools. Thus, irrespective of what a school's baseline is, it is expected to meet standards of class-level performance, in this case defined as 60% in the test administered by the administrative authority. The focus is thus on achievement and not growth.

Such high-stakes testing leads to a scenario where teachers will concentrate their energies on borderline children, those perceived to be close enough to the required test score that they can be pushed up if they are given some extra attention. There is no incentive for teachers to pay attention to and work on the children far below the required standard. As a result such children will get neglected and in extreme circumstances, forced to drop out of school.

Another fallacy lies in measuring teacher and school effectiveness solely through test scores. Test scores fail to account for differences in socio-economic backgrounds of students. Inferences about school and teacher quality must account for the differences in students' socio-economic

background, for example gender, caste, the income and educational levels of the parents especially the mother and whether the child gets supplementary help from tutors or parents. Unless such background factors are controlled for, test scores cannot be treated as sole determinants of teacher or school quality. It should be the objective of our education system to make every child reach required levels of class proficiency. But unless the ultimate objective is pursued with care, the whole system can become counter-productive.

The advantage that Indian policy makers have is that they can learn from the mistakes that other countries have made in designing school accountability systems. Research points towards the efficacy of adopting a more nuanced, flexible and value-added measure of student assessment, that measures growth as well as achievement. In this approach, schools track the progress of each student year on year. Success in this system is defined by a certain amount of growth, even if the student does not reach class level.

Furthermore, differences in student background characteristics are controlled for, thereby isolating the contribution of schools and teachers to student learning. Such a system encourages teachers to pay attention to the lowest-performing children and acknowledges the progress that a school has made without compromising on the ultimate goal of meeting proficiency levels.

Accountability is crucial to improving learning achievement levels of school children in India and the fact that state governments are putting into place accountability systems is laudable. However, a poorly designed accountability system focused on high stakes testing will hit the poorest and most educationally backward students the hardest and only serve to exacerbate the achievement gap between such children and the children of the wealthy.

(The author works at Azim Premji Foundation)
Reprinted from Business Line



A few days ago, I came across a statement by Albert Einstein, “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted”, and it set me thinking.

We like counting. When we claim to be a country striving towards ‘development’, what really do we mean by ‘development’? Many indices rank countries based on their performance on various ‘indicators’ of development. Have they been able to measure everything that counts? In most cases, the tangible is measured first, since it is the easiest to count, but it is the intangible, which might matter the most.

The first scale used to measure development was Gross Domestic Product (GDP), or a country’s income. In 1990, there was a change in this perspective of looking at development through a crude economic lens alone. This first step towards measuring development with a focus on the country’s people centric policies was taken by Mahbub Ul Haq, who created the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI, used by UNDP to measure development, looks at three things—Health, indicated by the life expectancy at birth; Education, indicated by mean years of schooling and expected years of schooling; and Living



Standards, measured by Gross National Income per capita. Life expectancy at birth accounts for the number of years a person will live but not the quality of that life. Mortality rates surely indicate our susceptibility to death, but how do we measure how well we live?

The intangible matters not only when we are talking about quality of life, but even while calculating our GDP. Only 36% of the world's GDP is from the tangible sectors of manufacturing and agriculture, while 64 % is from the services industry.

Way back in 1968, the American politician, Robert Kennedy, was disturbed by our tendency to measure only the tangible, "The gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile".

The Gupta Period was known as the Golden Age of India, because there was growth in all fields including art, literature and astronomy during this time. Yet, the current Multi-dimensional Poverty Index developed by Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative and the UNDP only checks on the lack of food, education (defined as years of schooling), health and infrastructure. What about lack of choice? Lack of knowledge? Is poor quality education not a sign of poverty?

The intangible is lost in the crowd of 298 World Development Indicators developed by the World Bank. Of the 87 indicators used to measure education, none look at the quality of education - none ask if children are happy going to school. The 29 social development indicators do look at gender equality, but measure it in terms of education and health, and overlook issues of discrimination and

insecurity. The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) of the UNDP is also silent on these issues. A recent study published by Thomson Reuters Foundation, indicates that India is the 4th most dangerous country for women. The indicators used were health, discrimination, sexual violence, non sexual violence, cultural facts and trafficking rate. How can living in fear lead to development?

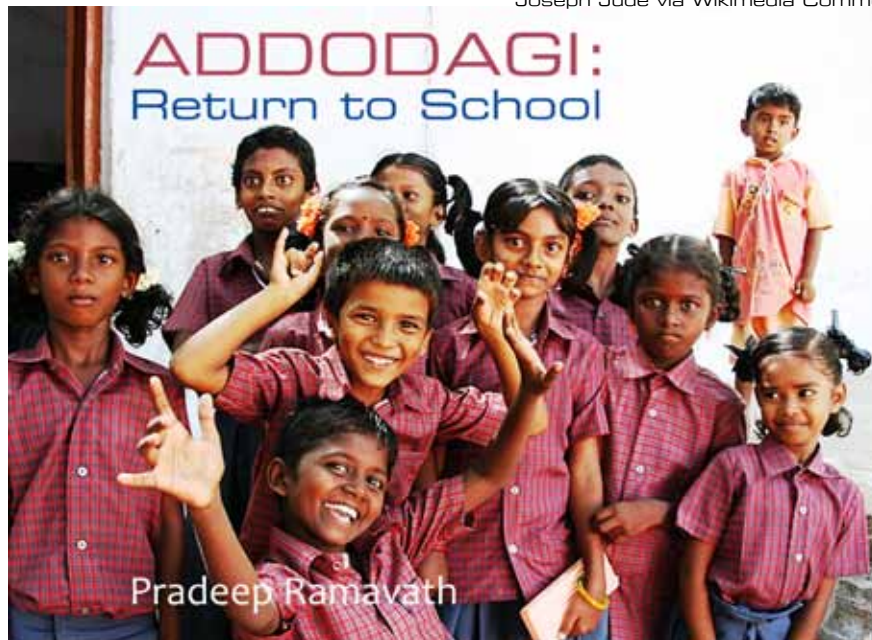
Recently, efforts have been made to also capture the qualitative aspects of life, albeit by calling them Governance Indicators. For example, the World Governance Indicators prepared by the World Bank uses six qualitative dimensions to measure development - Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, Control of Corruption.

Bhutan's former ruler, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, wanted to create an enabling environment for his people to be happy. For him, that is the only measure of good governance and development. He envisaged a Happiness Index. Today, more and more of the world's leaders are trying to measure the Gross National Happiness of their countries.

Development is freedom, happiness, free thinking, a space where the mind can grow without fear, a community where the spirit of democracy does not get replaced by majoritarianism. True development should include sustainability of the environment, as well as that of cultures. How do we measure a community that has respect for diversity, compassion, and creates an environment of well being? When a tolerant society is an essential factor for 'well being', we need to think about measuring the intangible indicators that are a true measure of development.

(The author works at Azim Premji Foundation)

Joseph Jude via Wikimedia Commons



and Action (PPA) initiative. PPA is a community empowerment process in keeping with Namma Shale's premise that community participation is a crucial input for improving the performance of government schools. As part of the PPA process, the community participates in planning, implementing and evaluating the project from the beginning. The Namma Shale team's role was only to facilitate the process of planning and implementation by providing technical and financial inputs wherever necessary and demanded by the planning by the

community.

Addodagi is a small village in the Rukmapura cluster, within the jurisdiction of Sugur Gram Panchayat in north Karnataka. Most of the population of Addodagi is engaged in daily wage employment. The village has one lower primary government school which is around 35 years old. The school had two teachers and one head teacher who was well-known as a drunkard. Apart from being a drunkard, the head teacher was also irregular. He did not take any classes, did not come regularly to the school, and disrupted many processes in the school, including the mid-day meal. He did not involve teachers and staff in the decision-making process. He was even involved in the forgery of a number of documents relating to SDMC records, and in the misappropriation of school funds. The people of Addodagi had reached the end of their tether and started sending their children to other schools.

When the PPA process was started, the feedback of the community to the Namma Shaale team was, "If you have the guts, please change the school head teacher." The community had reported this as a serious issue with the officials in the government but no action was taken. The community demanded that this school be shut down. Once the community started engaging with the other stakeholders the issue was resolved. Pressure from the community increased and the government transferred this head teacher to another school. Once this demand was met, parents started sending the children back to this school. In 2008, 28 children who had earlier dropped out of school were brought back. Attendance has increased to 90%. The process has empowered the community. The next challenge they are taking on is to improve the anganwadi.

In this seemingly hopeless situation the Namma Shale team began its Participatory Planning

(The author works at Azim Premji Foundation)

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