



Dear Readers,

Wish you a very happy New Year. As always, it has been fun and invigorating working on the newsletter together. This issue contains glimpses from the 2007 annual conference written by Sheel Parekh of Teacher Plus/Spark-India. We have been overwhelmed by the conference attendance and the enthusiastic participation! Please visit our website (<http://www.learningnet-india.org>) to access detailed minutes and presentations, share those experiences with your friends, or just read over a cup of tea.

We hope that Shri. Sundaram's thoughts on privatizing primary education or Shri Durai's observations on bilingual instruction will elicit your responses. We also include profiles of IDEAL from Gujarat and Shikshamitra from West Bengal. We are sure you will enjoy connecting with these groups in person or over phone/email. Two

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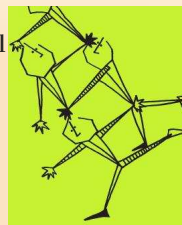
nourishing invitations come your way— one to join a math forum and another to cultivate a conscious parenting group. We encourage you to join, share, and learn! We thank all of you who contributed to this newsletter and look forward to your comments.

Best Wishes,

The Newsletter Team (Reshma, Meenakshi, Anita)

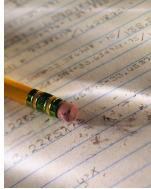
REVIVE 2007

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Viewpoint

Privatization: An answer to quality primary education?



Shri Sundaram Subbharatnam examines whether primary education can be considered as a business and if schools operating as businesses can provide quality education. He is the principal at Atul Vidyalaya in Valsad Dist., Gujarat. Readers are invited to share their views by emailing him at sundaram48@yahoo.com

There is a common notion that since schools have an income (tuition fees) and expenditure (salaries etc) they can be considered as businesses. Let us analyze this premise. Education and health is the fundamental right of every citizen of a country. They are also the future intellectual & physical defense of a country. In the future knowledge economy intellectual defenses will be more important than military defenses.

A good and effective primary education is necessary to develop a love for learning, thinking capacity to decide about further education and the basic competencies needed to pursue post-primary education. The Government should look at Primary Education as a social and economic enabling activity. It should be seen as a developmental activity instead of an administrative activity like other government departments.

Good primary education should be available free to every citizen irrespective of economic status or purchasing power.

As opposed to this, businesses are basically activities taken up for satisfying certain needs of customers at a profit. Profit is necessary for businesses. Businesses are not vital in the same way as education, defense and health are for the society. Hence they are expected to be economically self-sustainable. There is no necessity to subsidize such activities. In order to ensure that customers pay a good price for the services or goods, businesses ensure that their goods & services cater

to the demands of customers. If that is not the case, then customers will not pay and the businesses have to close.

On the contrary, all civilizations have accepted that policies and processes of education should be based on certain philosophical ideas of what constitutes good education. The educational policies of a school need not just cater to what parents want. It is the duty of educators to educate parents about the kind of education their children should be receiving. Hence the notion of 'quality' education should not depend necessarily on what parents expect.

Thus, there is a fundamental conflict between values of education as compared to the values of a business. Every society allows schools to be run

Can a school, run like a business, offer quality education?

as non-profit entities. This does not mean that schools should not make profit. It means that schools need not make profits. Schools need not have to adopt un-educational policies just to turn a profit. They are given tax and other concessions and the flexibility to raise funds through donations.

Today, there is a notion among many people that since the Government has made a mess of education, private initiatives should be welcome. There is also an unwritten assumption that private schools would offer better education compared to government schools. Let us see whether a school run as a private business can provide quality education. I would like to clarify here that by quality I mean a notion of quality as defined by educational philosophers & thinkers.

Let us take the example of an entrepreneur who wants to start a quality primary school. Say that the school has to pay its teachers the government mandated salaries, keep a maximum of 30 students per section and offer some extra curricular activities. A back-of-the-envelope calculation would indicate that the cost per student would come to Rs 650 per month at the beginning salary scales for teachers.

And this would not cover the capital cost of building and land. This would mean a tuition fee of at least Rs. 800 per student per month.

Now, how many entrepreneurs would be interested in starting primary schools under such conditions that are by no means unrealistic from an educational perspective? If the government thinks that its employees need to get a living wage it is only reasonable that a teacher who is doing the difficult job of teaching is paid equally well.



Why should teachers and students in private schools be penalized with such un-educational and unethical measures if the government is unable to enforce accountability in its own schools?

However when faced with the prospect of being unable to collect adequate fees from their students, most entrepreneurs who run schools as businesses adopt educationally & ethically unsound practices. Teachers are paid unfair wages, less competent teachers who are willing to work for a lower

salary are employed, the class size is increased beyond reasonable levels and extra-curricular activities are all cut down. It is unfortunate that most parents seem to agree with these measures. Why should teachers and students in private schools be penalized with such un-educational and unethical measures if the government is unable to enforce accountability in its own schools? Do we then still say that most parents have an understanding of quality education?

It is possible that in a few urban centres individuals set up primary schools that sustain themselves on the fees that they collect from students. Like a few primary schools in affluent areas the small percentage of students who go in for secondary and tertiary education may also be in a position to pay the full cost of their education allowing schools to generate enough fees to pay fair wages to teachers. But such cases are very few.

Moreover, the notion that well known private schools in urban centres provide quality education has recently come under a scanner. A recent

study jointly conducted by Educational Initiatives and Wipro Ltd has revealed that the levels of understanding of students in many of these schools is nothing much to boast of. It challenges the common assumption that private schools with good infrastructure and examination results provide good quality education. Clearly we need to rethink what we mean by good quality education in the context of the future Knowledge Society?

In conclusion, by not taking serious steps to improve the quality of education in its schools, the Government is creating a situation where many people start looking for better alternatives and are willing to pay a hefty price. In this situation private entrepreneurs start looking at school education as a business. Private schools offering good primary education at a price that much of our population cannot afford can never be an alternative sustainable in the long run. Nor sustainable is the situation of private schools offering education of a doubtful quality at prices the customers can afford.

Will the government ever think of outsourcing defense of a country to private operators or that that defense of a country should pay for itself? If primary education is the long term defense of a country why should education receive such treatment? The only possible solution to this situation is for civil society to get together and pressurize the Government to become accountable for their educational responsibilities. Every other solution is just a cosmetic one.



Maths Alive! - A Resource book

by Shashidhar Jagadeeshan, Published by Scholastic

Those interested in organizing Math Mela in their schools will find this book informative. The book suggests interesting and enjoyable activities at both the junior and senior levels. The author teaches at the Centre for Learning in Bangalore.

Sharing Corner

Hooked On Learning

Sheel Parekh shares her experiences at the 2007 Annual Learning Network Conference. This article was published in the Teacher Plus magazine in September 2007. The author can be reached at sheel.sheel@gmail.com

The Learning Network, an eclectic mix of organizations and individuals interested in holistic learning, held its 5th Annual Conference at Chamarajanagar, Karnataka, from Jul 20-22, 2007. Chamarajanagar is a little over an hour's drive from Mysore – a bustling town with its own charm. Held on the premises of the school run by the Deenabandhu Trust, the Learning Network conference this year includes over 30 discussions, presentations and workshops spread over three days. An exceptional attribute of the Network is informality, which enables one to function with minimal reserve, facilitating easy exchange and assimilation of new ideas.




Among the issues that are highlighted are teaching methods and resources, teachers' issues and school administration issues. While Ganath of Suvidya throws light on the various notions that impede the learning of mathematics and takes people through various simple practices and aids that

can help children understand the intricacies of this subject, the team from Navnirmithi discusses the Universalization of math and illustrates the effectiveness of their methods and resource materials. Geetha Arvind, an interested individual, initiates a discussion on the learning of science, and Shishu Milap follows it up in another session with their experiences of teaching science through experiential methods. Rajaram and Vidya talk about the online resources available at Vidya Online, while artist Ranjan De takes others through a session on using art and craft as means of meeting the demands of the curriculum.

US based Dr. Shelley Thomas gives an introduction to Total Physical Response Story-telling (TPRS), a new method of teaching/learning proven to help in learning language effectively, at an unprecedented pace, and now being used at the Isha Home School in the teaching of Science and Math as well. Sunita Rao of Kalpavriksh presents the work done in the B R Hills with children of the Soliga tribe – meeting learning objectives while showing clearly how it is imperative – and possible – to learn from our surroundings and live in harmony with nature. Saraswati and Rajalakshmi share how activity centres within schools have made some headway in bridging the gaps in educational opportunities that children from underprivileged backgrounds experience, while Ananth Kumar of Divyadeepa Trust explores the relation between the child's emotional health and her learning capacity.

Lata and Ashok from IDEAL present their findings as to what children in villages know before they come to school, and how children learn up to the age of 6. The team from Pachasaale brings to the fore the need for education relevant to the situation, particularly for out of school children – the necessity of involving communities, of establishing connections between what is learned and what vocations are possible. The team from the Sanctuary Schools, Kaigal, highlights the need for teacher enrichment as a necessary step to learning. Noted educationist Jane Sahi speaks of creating spaces for “collaboration” between the teacher and the child, and between children themselves. A team from NIAS reflects upon issues that have emerged from their experiences of working with the government primary school system: issues of quality, innovation, capacity building and systemic reforms. Well-



Coordinated by a group of volunteers, these discourses, however, are neither theme-bound nor dictated by any perceived need, but are determined by the participants themselves: the Network is a forum for creating awareness on innovative ideas, education methods and resources; for sharing one's own experiences, opinions and expertise; and for engaging others in discussion on matters that are of interest to oneself.

known educationist, Prakash Burte, explores the connection between equity, equality and quality of education.



School management issues and the role of school development and management committees also come up for debate, as does a discussion on the limitations of large scale interventions. There are some hands-on workshops too – on understanding adolescents, writing by and for teachers, inclusion and

appreciation of diversity, and using stories as a means of teaching/ learning. Parallel discussions take place ubiquitously – over breakfast, lunch, dinner, in the shuttles that ferry us to and fro, in the rooms... time flies by unregarded, as enthusiastic people interact. Exhibits and displays by various groups add flavour to the remarkable fare.

There is learning even in the arrangements that the hosts have made – the learning about hospitality, from making arrangements for stay to food and travel, that happens for the staff and children of the Deenabandhu Trust will last a lifetime. Not to mention the entertainment that the hosts organize – if shepherds from the surrounding areas present a traditional dance propitiating Siva one evening, complete with dress code, shell ornaments and bear-skin head-dresses, a dance troupe is called in on another day, to present other folk dances.

Of course, issues related to education, and to the Indian education system, are numerous. At the end of the conference, one has found some answers, certainly, but one also comes away with pertinent (and impertinent!) questions that have been planted there! The Learning Network has excellently lived up to its purpose yet again – in its fertile soil, people and organizations have shared their experiences and learned from each other.



Learning Spotlight

IDEAL



Institute for Development Education and Learning (IDEAL) is a non-profit organization established in 1993 on the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi by volunteers involved in improving primary health and education of the disadvantaged people of the society. Ashok Bhargava, an educationist and a social worker, and Dr Lata Shah, a gynecologist are the guiding force behind IDEAL. They have worked with tribals and Dalits in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra for over 30 years.

Since 1993 it has conducted over 400 training programs to improve the capacity of disadvantaged people to improve their health and education. These training programs for health workers, women and teachers help them enhance their information and skills to deal with problems they face in their day to day activities. The methods of training are designed using theories of how children and adults learn and communicate.

IDEAL has produced life size model of the uterus, small booklets, manuals and charts and to be used as teaching aids. Material prepared by IDEAL is always pre-tested before final production increasing its effectiveness. In addition small video programs on health and education related subjects have also been produced. These are used during in-house training sessions to start a discussion, to elaborate a point or to give a concrete example to clarify an abstract theory. Some of the publications include illustrated books on common ailments of women, anemia, sexually transmitted diseases & AIDS, eye diseases, malaria, worms, and manuals on essential drugs, diarrhea and malnutrition.



*For more information visit <http://www.learningnet-india.org>
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Sharing Corner

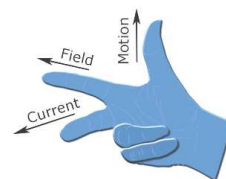
Bilingual Instruction

In this article Mr. Durai Krishnan of Sethu Bandhana Trust, Mysore shares his ideas on using English and the local language of the region - Kannada appropriately in teaching.

Have you often wondered how some concepts of science, mathematics or everyday life can be easily comprehended in our local language and the English words don't appeal as much? Or sometimes we seem to grasp the English terminology more easily and struggle to explain the same in the local language?

Some educationists believe that the mother tongue as the medium of instruction will help in understanding the subject matter. Some may think that difficult concepts of science and mathematics can be easily explained by the teacher and efficiently grasped by the student if the ideas are presented in the mother tongue. I am not disputing these views. I simply would like to share my experience in a few schools with the readers. I'll give a few examples to intrigue our minds on this.

The first example is from 10th Standard (Karnataka State) lessons. In the chapter on electromagnetic induction Fleming's rules describe the directions of three quantities under consideration. It says if a current carrying wire is placed in a magnetic field a mechanical force or motion is induced. On the other hand if a mechanical force is applied to an ordinary wire which is in a magnetic field electricity is generated. Fleming used left and right hands to explain the directions. Students usually find it difficult to see Fleming's elegant method. But there is help!



In Fleming's rule the three quantities are represented by the **thM** thumb, the **Fo**refinger and the **mI**ddle finger – where the bold underlined letters in the three words indicate the three quantities:- **M** for motion or

mechanical force, **F** for magnetic field, and **I** for current. Recent English medium textbooks have made this simpler by using **M**ain finger and **C**enter finger instead of **th**u**M**b and **m**iddle finger. The first letters of these words indicate motion and current respectively thereby easing to comprehension and memorization.

Corresponding Kannada words do not have such clues. It is advantageous for Kannada medium students to learn the highlighted English words for their own further development of applications.

Is it better sometimes to know just the technical word in English for the sake of learning or will the translated Kannada term help the English medium students further along?

Similarly it is crucial that Kannada medium students can understand and explain certain formulas in English. For example, $E = Mc^2$ where $E = \dots$, $M = \dots$, $c = \dots$, or Benzene = C_6H_6 where $C = \dots$, $H = \dots$. The nomenclature of chemical terms and some of the brilliant relationships of nature discovered are land marked by their construction in the English language.

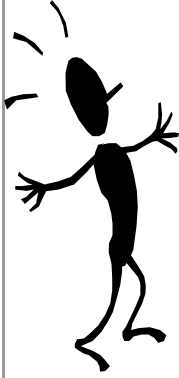
On the other hand, sometimes the translated Kannada terms can be of intuitive help to English medium students. Two types of plants, gymnosperms and angiosperms, are mentioned in our books. Gymnosperms are plants having naked seeds and angiosperms are plants whose seeds are enclosed. But these meanings are not obvious in English because usually the technical terms are derived from Latin and Greek. The corresponding Kannada term for gymnosperms is *anavritta beeja sasya* and for angiosperms is *aavritta beeja sasya*. These vernacular phrases literally translate the English explanations and render themselves self explanatory. Convenient!

Let us take one example in Mathematics. When working with number senses, sequences such as $\{1, 2, 3, 4, \dots\}$; $\{2, 5, 8, 11, \dots\}$ are called Arithmetic Progressions or A.P. The name does not automatically suggest the nature of the sequence. The Kannada version for this is

“samaanaanthara shredi” is quite self explanatory. If it does not ring a bell, with a little help from Kannada grammar, we can comprehend this term – split the sandhi as samaana + anthara! – meaning “same difference”!

Similarly sequences such as { 1, 3, 9, 27, ... } ; [2,4,8,16, ...] are called Geometric Progression or G.P. The Kannada version “gunotthara shredi” when split up, reads as “guna”+ “utthara”, which means “a multiplied result”! Sometimes I use this as an opportunity to throw in some extended learning moments. “In the Kannada word “gunotthara”, a + u -> o . Which sandhi is this?”

In conclusion, three points emerge -



- ▼ In schools where instructions rely on both Kannada (or any other language) and English, occasionally reviewing the ideas in both languages will provide better comprehension for students.
- ▼ While instructing in Kannada and other local languages, the teacher could validate the terminology in English for improving teaching and learning opportunities.
- ▼ Explanations in the mother tongue always helps students taught in English as it tends to be more experiential and intuitive!



Readers are welcome to share their opinion and experiences to this article by writing to : Shri Durai Krishnan, Sethu Bandhana Trust, A-1-4, 4th Main, Bogadi 2nd Stage (South), Mysooru, 570026, duraikris@gmail.com



Learning Spotlight

Shikshamitra



Shikshamitra (Friends of Learning), started in April 2005, consists of a Learning Centre (the school) as well as an Education Resource Centre.

The Learning Center is a Bengali medium secondary school for children from lower middle class and slum communities. It is open from 8am – 8pm for part-time and full-time learners, and adult learners. Shikshamitra believes that the school should help children become life long independent and motivated learners; balanced, happy and creative persons; socially, politically, culturally and ecologically sensitive people; and vocationally adept.

The learning process in the school focuses on children's abilities with emphasis on all aspects of learning – intellectual, physical, psychological and aesthetic. Children learn cooperatively in groups using theater, audio-visuals, music, dance, physical activities, arts & crafts as pedagogic tools. The school also plans to provide psychological and career counseling services, pre-vocational education, placement services, and apprenticeships.

The education resource center is home to a good education library, documentation service, research study wing, and publication division. The services are targeted towards teachers, supervisors, researchers, educationists, media persons, government policy makers, NGOs and academicians. The ERC networks with local, national and international organizations, government departments and individuals.



For more information visit
<http://shikshamitra.kolkata.googlepages.com>
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Book Announcement

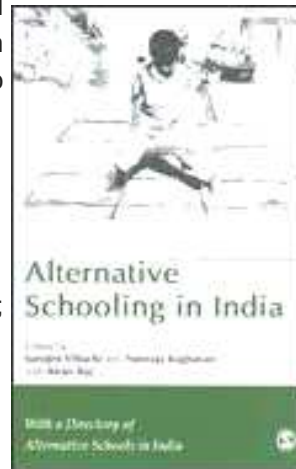
Alternative Schooling in India: edited by Sarojini Vittachi, Founder Director, Girls Education Plus, Bangalore; Neeraja Raghavan, Writer and Educational Consultant, Bangalore; and Kiran Raj, Technical Writer, Bangalore.

If you were looking for an all encompassing book on alternative schooling – this might be for you. The book brings into focus the innovative methods of learning in many Indian schools. It sheds light on schools that make the learning process fun for the teacher as well as the taught, in contrast to the whirl of examination-oriented learning in mainstream schools. Interviews with

The researched data on alternative schools in the country offer the reader efforts from many institutions all over the country moving away from traditional learning. Leading practitioners in the field offer insightful opinions into the ground reality when a certain philosophy is applied to a school, and experiential accounts of how such alternative practices mould the learner, teacher and impact the parent as well.

The book also consists of a directory of alternative schools in India, including many schools that are tucked away in remote corners of the country. Interestingly, the common thread binding these alternative schools is concern for the welfare of the child by teachers who see their work as much more than a job.

Published by SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
252 pages, ISBN: 978-0-7619-3619-0
For India, Nepal, Bhutan: Rs 360.
Contact the publishers at Tel: 011- 40539222;
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E-mail: marketing@sagepub.in for your copy.



Invitations



Active Maths Group – Join it!

August 2007 saw the beginnings of this discussion group initiated by S.N.Gananath, Director, Suvidya, Bangalore and S.Sundaram, Principal, Atul Vidyalaya, Atul, Gujarat. This is a great forum for teachers and others to exchange useful ideas and innovative resources for joyful and effective math teaching at primary and middle schools. Members can use this discussion forum to share experiences, teaching resources and seek / provide clarifications on pertinent issues. Resources such as puzzles, games, biographies, history of mathematics, videos, sharewares, articles and ebooks will be easily accessible to all. Membership is by invitation only. If interested please send your request to activemaths@yahoo.com



Conscious Parenting – An Invitation

This is an invitation to explore creating a space that supports our efforts in parenting consciously. The way we live, our thoughts, words and actions, all implicitly teach our children how to live. A parent is as much a teacher as a care giver. Today, as we attempt to live more consciously, it is wonderful to connect to with a supportive community to nourish ourselves. We hope to exchange experiences, ideas, challenges and questions on any topic that interests us as parents and teachers. We would like to solicit your ideas and suggestions to create this space. Please email Jayashree Janardhan at info@learningnet-india.org with your comments and interest to participate. You may also post your ideas via regular post to Jayashree Janardhan, DPH6, Mantri Splendour, Hennur road, Geddalahalli, Bangalore - 560077, (080)23683504

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About the Learning Network

The learning network is a network of groups exploring various approaches to holistic learning . It is a resource for educators, parents and organizations seeking meaningful approaches to education.

For more information on workshops, seminars, publications and members, Contact us at

Web www.learningnet-india.org

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