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**PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS
THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF EVERYDAY
PRACTICE**

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I Why a study on teachers?

Most debates and discussions on India's growth story or poverty levels or increasing social strife invariably veer around to education: the lack of it, its relevance in today's world, its quality and content and the state of our schools. As the debate gathers momentum a blame game begins. Some blame the government machinery; others point a finger at the corruption of institutions or the politicisation of content (curriculum). All analyses, however, agree on one factor—the importance of teachers. We bemoan the quality and dedication of the teaching community and in the same breath admit that the teacher in India is but a cog in a hierarchical administration, a powerless pawn in an intricate game of electoral politics. This ambivalence is not new, but what is new is the hopelessness that permeates the discourse across the country. At one level we pin our hopes on education; simultaneously, we grudgingly admit that nothing short of a systemic overhaul will do.

A great deal has been written about teachers in India and close to 20 commission and committee reports have been brought out by the government in the last 30 years (see reference annexure for a listing). Every few years yet another high level committee is set up to review different aspects of education—it gives detailed recommendations and there is even some debate on it. The process then runs cold. The reports talk of yet another effort made by the government, adding to the long list of documents that are quoted.

Some changes can indeed be observed on the ground. Teachers' salaries have increased sharply in recent years, making regular teaching positions highly sought after; and in-service teacher-training has become a regular and important activity in every state. Yet, the available evidence from every part of the country clearly demonstrates that students are not learning. In particular from 2006, when the first Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER) was released, there has been increasing public debate on the abysmally low learning levels in primary schools, as exemplified by children's inability to read a short paragraph or solve a simple division problem.

One set of arguments places the responsibility for this situation squarely on the teachers themselves. If inputs received by teachers such as pay scales and training programmes, have improved and yet educational outcomes remain abysmally poor, the reasoning goes, then teachers themselves are clearly to blame. The media often portrays teachers, especially in government primary schools, as a cadre of government employees who get good salaries but do little work. In recent years there has been a great deal of public anger against teachers; many view the mushrooming tuition centres run by teachers during and after school hours as the privatisation of a public service. Recent research has generated alarming statistics on teacher absence in Indian primary schools and has also highlighted inadequate content knowledge and pedagogical skills among teachers. In this view, what is required is increased accountability from teachers, who need to be held responsible for the outcomes of their work.

A second set of arguments, often utilised by teachers themselves and also documented by a range of research reports and analyses, blames the larger political and bureaucratic environment within which teachers operate. Teachers across the

country report being under tremendous pressure from the administration to furnish reams of data through countless formats. Political leaders expect them to lobby and campaign for them in return for protection or favours and the district administration expects them to carry out a range of administrative duties. Teachers also claim that their working conditions are poor and they have to negotiate a corrupt system where programmes involving mid-day meals, construction and repair of buildings, teaching-learning material (TLM) and, most importantly, teacher-training, are converted into rent-seeking opportunities. Proponents of these arguments say that if teachers were only left alone to do their jobs, they would have the time and space they need to dedicate to teaching.

A third set of arguments, utilised most often by educationists and NGOs around the country who have engaged with the realities of teachers and teaching at the primary level, looks primarily at how the terms 'teacher' and 'teaching' are conceived within our education system, and how this conceptualisation is reflected in existing systems for teacher-training and support. Despite the idealised vision of the teacher contained in education policy documents, the education system treats teachers as lowly recipients and implementers of instructions and content designed elsewhere, rather than as actively engaged participants in a creative and dynamic process. Teachers have neither incentives nor support to find ways of teaching better: why then should they bother? Evidence in favour of these arguments can be found in the outcomes of innovative initiatives such as the Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP) in Rajasthan, Eklavya in Madhya Pradesh (MP), Nali Kali in Karnataka and the work of the Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education (HBCSE) in Maharashtra, among many others. These arguments emphasise the view that in order to succeed, efforts at reform must place teachers themselves squarely in the centre of a process of analysis, design and implementation.

The above discussion tries to simplify a very complex situation in order to illustrate the different ways in which to think about the issue of improving the quality of teaching in our primary schools. Is there a 'right answer'? How can we even begin to think about how to improve the quality of primary schooling if we are unable to agree on a diagnosis?

The Indian education system is under tremendous pressure to adapt to the growing demand for meaningful education for all, and the teacher, the only visible functionary in an otherwise opaque system, is facing the brunt of the attack from all sides. Since 1990 the proactive role of the Government of India (GoI) for 'Education for All' has not only resulted in the introduction of a range of Central Sector Schemes which have pumped in financial resources for school improvement and teacher development; it has also increased the demand for data for monitoring progress. There is no doubt that the teacher is at the receiving end and as Dr. Raghavendra Chattopadhyay explains: 'by putting unbearable pressure you harvest corruption.'¹ An added complication is that according to recent District Information System on Education (DISE) data (Mehta 2008) about 10 per cent of the teachers are over the age of 55 years and thus expected to retire soon. At the same time, given expanding enrolments as also an increasing child population, there will soon be 24 crore children in the 5 to 14 years age group. India will need a huge army of teachers: some estimates put it at close to 60 lakhs only at the primary and middle school levels. Conceiving of a systemic overhaul on this scale is a daunting task.

¹ Interview with Dr. Raghavendra Chattopadhyay, IIM-Calcutta, Kolkata, 15 July 2008.

This Booklet

This booklet starts from the assumption that teachers are a product of the system that selects, prepares, supports and evaluates them. Teachers do not enter the profession knowing what to do: they learn what is expected of them, and it is the education system itself that teaches them their role within it, not only in training programmes but in many other ways both obvious and subtle. In other words, what teachers do in the classroom reflects a set of conditions *on the ground* that establish the real parameters within which they work. We emphasise 'on the ground' because policies on paper and implementation in the field can often look very different.

A few examples might help to clarify this point:

- If beginning teachers are required to have completed Class 12, but are never screened for teaching aptitude either initially or at any time during their careers, what message does the 'system' transmit about the importance of teaching ability?
- If teachers are told in training programmes that they must use creative teaching techniques to promote 'joyful learning', but are evaluated by supervisors on whether or not they have covered the textbooks, which set of instructions are they likely to follow?
- If students' learning levels make absolutely no difference to a teacher's access to a better job or a higher salary, why then should she bother to try to teach better?
- If a local politician can have a teacher transferred simply because he wants to, can we really expect her to put the needs of her students before her own need for job security?

In this booklet, therefore, we look at the ways in which conditions on the ground affect how teachers perceive and implement their work. These conditions are sometimes the result of stated, formal policy measures (such as those that specify criteria for promotions) and sometimes the outcome of unstated but nevertheless powerful informal processes and mechanisms (such as local politicians' ability to transfer teachers). Taken together, these conditions reflect the reality, as opposed to the theory, of 'teacher development' in India.

By 'teacher development' we mean much more than teacher-training, although this is unquestionably a key aspect. We view teacher development as a *process* that begins with the definition of the criteria that define who can become a teacher; continues with the design and implementation of pre-service training courses; involves how newly-trained teachers are assigned to schools and what they are expected to do on a day to day basis once appointed; depends heavily on the nature of regular institutional support and supervision provided; and is affected by the options available to teachers for getting better jobs, higher salaries or advanced degrees. Following Leu (2004):

Effective professional development is a process that runs along a continuum that extends throughout a teacher's career. Different kinds of professional development and support are needed at different stages of this continuum from preservice programs for students preparing to become teachers, to mentoring and inservice support for new teachers in the first years of practice, to continuing inservice for experienced and all other teachers and school leaders to introduce and explore new teaching ideas, new practice, and the changing role of education as systems evolve.

At the policy level, when we looked at literature on teacher development we found that almost every conceivable issue had been covered. Every successive committee and commission starts off by paying homage to the holistic approach of the 1968 Kothari Commission. The history of recommendations since then is reiterated and analysed. Other important milestones are invoked—Challenge of Education Document of 1985, the National Policy of 1986, the insightful analysis of the Chhattopadhyay Commission of 1983, Yashpal Committee of 1993 on ‘learning without burden’ and, most recently, the focus group papers and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of 2005. Almost all this material is easily available and accessible on the Internet; clearly a lot of effort has gone into compiling and uploading it.

Yet, when we go beyond policy documents and commission reports, the twists and turns of everyday practice leave one wondering why there is so much talk and so little action.

In preparation for writing this booklet we travelled to five states (Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Kerala, West Bengal and Rajasthan) that differ widely on a range of indicators, whether economic, social, political, or educational. We read the substantial body of literature now available on different aspects of teachers’ lives and work, and we also drew extensively upon our past professional experience. We talked to teacher educators and administrators at the state and district levels, met with teachers and teacher union leaders, tried to engage in a dialogue with elected representatives at the village level and spoke to researchers and educationists. Our initial set of questions was simple:

- Who are teacher candidates, and how are they trained to become teachers?
- Once appointed, what is expected of teachers? How do they view their professional objectives and set about achieving them?
- How is everyday practice in schools influenced by the relationship between the teacher and the education system as it manifests itself on the ground?

This booklet is the result of our exploration. It is neither an academic text nor a chronological account of teacher education policies; nor a comprehensive review of everything you always wanted to know about teachers in India. It is an attempt to describe the context in which teachers teach and to identify and analyse some of the key factors that shape their practice, while also looking at innovative strategies and initiatives in both the government and the non-government sector that have tried to address the issues identified. A final chapter summarises the conclusions we arrived at and pulls together the suggestions of people we met on how we might move forward. Finally, we include a reference annexure to enable readers to readily refer to the policies and programmes that are mentioned. This does not purport to be an exhaustive chronology of policies and programmes on teacher development in India, but is an attempt to collate available information for ready reference. An extensive bibliography is included for additional reference.

II She becomes a teacher!

Meet Malati, just appointed as a regular school teacher in a rural two-teacher school:

Malati is 20 years old. She comes from a middle class family and lives in a small town. She completed Class 12 two years ago with 58 per cent marks and then enrolled for a primary teacher-training course, which lasted one year. She decided to become a teacher because the salary is good and she likes being with children. Also, she wants to get married soon and feels that the hours are convenient – she will be able to look after her household duties also.

Malati is among the lucky few to get a job as a regular teacher. She had hoped for a school within her town, but is appointed to a rural district school about an hour away by bus. On her first day of school, Malati leaves home early to take a bus to the village where her school is located, then walks from the bus stand to the school. As she nears the school her heart sinks. In front of her is a dilapidated two-room structure with broken windows. A few children playing in the playground strewn with bricks, stones and garbage greet her and when she asks them where the teacher is, they tell her that he comes by the 10 am bus. She goes into the building, where there are no benches for children, the rooms are dusty and unkempt, and two chairs lie in the far corner of the verandah. There is no water in the pot, no toilet anywhere in sight and no sign of charts or books.

Eventually, her co-teacher arrives. A middle-aged man who has worked in this school for three years, he has nothing much to say to her about how she should go about her work, how she should manage a group of children from different classes in the same room and, most importantly, what it is that is expected of her as a teacher. She is just asked to handle Classes 1-3: more than 60 children crammed into a dark, airless, colourless room. Nothing she had learnt in her teacher-training programme helps her understand how to deal with this reality.

She decides that she should get to know her students and tries to ask them some questions. But only those sitting in the first few rows are paying attention. The children at the back are talking among themselves and she worries that they are making too much noise. Confused, she decides that she ought to try to teach them something. So she leads them through a recitation of the alphabet, interrupted many times by her telling first one child then another to keep quiet, pay attention and sit down. Somehow she gets through the day.

Within a week of joining, Malati is informed that the textbooks have to be collected from the local cluster office. She makes the journey hoping to meet other teachers like her. When she reaches the cluster school she is handed a number of forms to fill before she can collect the books. Since she did not bring the data with her, she trudges back to her school and returns four hours later with the registers. As she fills out the forms she notices that the official enrolment is far higher than what she has seen so far. Brushing it aside, she picks up the books and notices that the one on Environmental Studies (EVS) is missing. The cluster resource centre (CRC) resource person tells her that he will inform her when the EVS books arrive.

Malati tells the resource person that she is having trouble dealing with such a large group, especially since they are of different ages and asks what is expected of her as a teacher. He looks surprised and says: follow the textbook, teach and make sure you furnish all the information that the government asks for.

Malati attends a monthly meeting in the nodal school at the cluster level and collects her salary slip (her salary is deposited in a bank). Life goes on, she quickly realises that no one visits her school – there is no inspection. Sometimes the block resource centre (BRC) or Cluster Resource Centre (CRC) teachers come for a little while, fill out forms, look at the registers, scrutinise the mid-day meal register and leave. There is little discussion about teaching and learning. No one asks her what she has been doing in the classroom or how she is managing a group of children who are technically in different classes. She notes that even the children in Class 3 cannot read or write.

Soon Malati is informed that she must help conduct the household survey in the village. As the survey date approaches, she seeks out her co-teacher to take his advice on how to conduct the survey. He asks her to meet the local panchayat pradhan (village head) and fill out the forms with his help. He hands her a copy of the previous year's survey and tells her to make sure that the number of out of school children comes down. The next few days are spent filling out the forms and compiling the data; Malati has little time to teach.

As the months go by, Malati settles into a routine. She takes the 10 am bus and reaches the school around 11 am, teaches a group of students for about 40 to 50 minutes, supervises the mid-day meal, does some paperwork and returns by the 3 pm bus. She is home by 4 or 5 pm. Every month she goes with her co-teacher to the cluster or block centre for the monthly meeting and to collect her salary slip.

At the end of the academic year, she purchases question papers from the market and organises an annual examination for the children. She writes the questions on the blackboard – one by one (as the blackboard is not very good and the children cannot read if anything is written on the periphery of the board). Sometimes, she also writes the answers. Some children are able to copy from the board, a few are able to answer the questions but most of them just hang around not knowing what to do. The children who go for tuitions do better. But many others do not even understand the language used for teaching. In one sense it hardly matters: the no detention policy ensures that they will all pass. But what are they learning? Malati dwells on this thought for a bit, and then the moment passes. The days go by swiftly and before she realises it the summer vacation arrives.

Malati is asked to attend a six-day training at the district headquarter. She seeks out other women teachers to find out where they stay during the training. She does not get any specific answer; many of them do not attend the mandatory training, as there is no place to stay. She arranges with a distant relative to stay in his home. On the first day of training she reaches the venue at 9 am and waits for a long time before a few more teachers arrive. A resource teacher takes a class on 'hard spots' in mathematics teaching for Class 3. Later another resource person talks about joyful learning and the play way method – a lecture that she finds interesting, but which provides no solutions for her situation. How do you use the play way method with one teacher and 60 children in one room? At no point do the resource persons or teachers ask her or any other teacher about the problems they face in school. She

wants to ask many questions, but is afraid to speak in front of her seniors. Malati attends all six days and collects some photocopied material. The attendance in the training varies from 60 on the first and last day when registers are signed and travel forms are filled to 20 on another day.

During the training Malati meets a few older relatives who have been teachers for a long time. She is asked to become a member of a teacher's union and is informed that once she is a member (or for that matter once anyone becomes a regular school teacher) no one can touch her. The job she has is secure and for life. Her relatives tell her not to worry about the rural posting, it can be sorted out in due course; she will have to bear it for the first few years. She experiences a sense of pride at becoming a permanent government employee. Her work has turned out to be not so difficult since she only needs to do what her seniors tell her to do. Her salary is fairly good and she is ready to wait.

It did not take Malati very long to understand what was expected of her. She must come to school at least for a few hours for a few days in a week. She must read the textbook aloud to the students. As far as possible, she must keep them quiet and obedient. By the end of the year she must cover the syllabus, because if an inspector comes this is what he will check. She must supervise the mid-day meal, fill out innumerable forms and do whatever other duties she is assigned.

Malati received no induction training. There was no one to guide or help her understand how to manage a multi-grade classroom or how to teach a chapter in a textbook that she herself didn't understand. In the monthly meetings and the annual training, nobody talked or asked about the real problems that teachers face. Nobody knew or seemed to care whether the children were learning or not.

Malati came to teaching with an open mind, eager to learn and grow. Her experience is not unique. Discussions with teachers across the country reveal a similar picture, with notable exceptions of course. Young and not so young people (there is no age limit in Tamil Nadu (TN) where teachers are recruited through the employment exchange) become 'regular government school teachers' and start off like most young people do – with energy and hope. But as the years roll by they change.

What does Malati's journey tell us? Conceptually we can delineate three domains:

- ⇒ How do the environment and administration of the school shape what teachers do?
- ⇒ How do formal institutional systems for supervision and support affect teaching practice?
- ⇒ How do these ground realities affect teachers' perceptions of their professional roles and objectives?

We try and trace these domains through the experiences of teachers, teacher educators and administrators whom we interacted with and from the many studies and reports that we reviewed.

How the school environment shapes teachers and vice-versa

School infrastructure has received a great deal of attention from policy makers in recent years (see national and state timelines in the reference annexure). Operation

Blackboard was introduced in 1987 to improve the overall infrastructure of schools and to ensure that every school has at least two teachers. As recommended by the 1968 National Education Policy (NEP) and reiterated in the 1986 policy, GoI agreed to pay for the additional teacher in single-teacher schools and funds were also made available for TLA.

On the ground, the uneven implementation of this policy is clearly perceptible. At one end are Kerala and Tamil Nadu where the school buildings look fairly neat and clean, there is an adequate number of classrooms, a boundary wall and drinking water. Maharashtra and Rajasthan come next where the availability of buildings and basic amenities is fairly good except in remote or interior areas and in tribal villages. West Bengal is a picture of decay and neglect—the buildings are old and often crumbling, they look as if they have not been painted in decades and the overall environment is depressing. Similarly, if we were to focus on the number of single- and two-teacher schools or on the academic infrastructure (the availability of library and reference books, charts, maps, basic science equipment and so on) there is again a huge difference between states. Overall, at the ground level the primary/elementary school is nothing like what our policy makers conceptualise as an ideal school environment.

Although the environment in which a school functions affects teachers, whether we look at infrastructure, at the availability of TLA, or at the number of teachers appointed, it is equally true that teachers in turn influence the overall learning environment. It is a two-way process. What then determines whether this two-way process produces a positive, creative learning environment or a negative spiral of indifference and decay?

Case studies of exceptional government schools suggest that a highly committed head teacher and teachers can make a big difference. In 2004, Sandhan (Jaipur) did in-depth case studies of 10 schools in Rajasthan as a part of a larger quantitative study covering over 660 schools. The overall understanding that emerged through school observation, community dialogue and teacher interviews is revealing:

- If teachers are hard working and sensitive towards the students, it ensures positive community support for the school.
- Mutual understanding and coordination among teachers within a school has a positive impact on the overall educational environment of the school.
- If teachers are creative and committed, they always find a way out even in difficult circumstances.
- If teachers are sincere, the budget allocated by the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) is optimally utilised.
- The teacher-student ratio affects the educational environment and students' learning achievement. This one thing is beyond the control of teachers.

We are confronted with this reality: regardless of the 'system' there are always teachers and head teachers who are able to elicit parental and community support to improve the overall learning environment in the school. Equally, notwithstanding the best programmes and high budget allocations, a group of indifferent administrators, head teachers and teachers becomes a stumbling block in improving the learning environment. **The agency of the head teacher and teachers at the school level and that of the administrators who directly supervise the school emerge as critical factors.**

Why are most teachers unable or unwilling to provide this leadership? The crux of the problem lies with what the 'system' expects from the teacher. Let us revisit Malati's story. When she joined the school she did not have any induction workshop, no one told her what she should do in class or what was expected of her. The few times when she did interact with her superiors, all they wanted her to do was to fill out forms and to take the textbooks; later she was asked to do a household survey. When she wanted to know what she should do or how she should tackle a particular educational situation or problem, she had nobody to turn to. In this situation, Malati had no way of judging whether she was teaching well or whether she could help students learn more by doing things differently. Nor did she have any reason to even bother to think about it.

Discussions with teachers in the five states we visited confirm Malati's experience. Academic support institutions in Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu (TN) were engaged in some degree of academic monitoring and support, although these were for the most part designed to ensure teachers' compliance with predefined tasks and procedures, rather than to encourage them to analyse their teaching practices in the light of their students' learning outcomes. In Rajasthan and West Bengal, on the other hand, the signals from the top were often contradictory and limited to administrative matters and data collection. Let us take a quick look at these two states.

In **West Bengal**, primary schools are 'managed' by a number of different bodies. Teachers are appointed at the district level but come under the administrative control of the West Bengal Board of Primary Education (WBBPE), their training and supervision comes under the Directorate of School Education (DSE) and DI of Schools, the funds are controlled by the DI of Schools. Under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) fund flow, monitoring (data gathering) and training is handled by the SSA directorate and its district wing. The District Primary School Council (DPSC) and the panchayat do not speak in one voice: the DPSC is partly nominated and the panchayat, an elected body, has no administrative role in schools.

These various bodies were created at different points of time for specific reasons. According to the DPSC Chairperson we interviewed and the SSA coordinators at the state and district levels, the existence of multiple chains of command essentially implies that the teacher is at the receiving end of instructions from all but effectively accountable to no one in particular. The 'school' also comes under different bodies and therefore there is no coherent/coordinated body that takes care of all aspects of schooling. No one can be held responsible for this sorry state of affairs and everyone passes the buck. Organisations like the Pratichi Trust working in the state say that as a result there is no effective support or supervision and the schools are in a state of decay.

Said Kumar Rana of the Pratichi Trust: '...Pratichi Trust's strategy is clear. We believe that teachers are a huge resource and they can contribute a lot and only they can break the cycle of poor quality and high drop out rates. We need to demand involvement of teachers in policy-making and in formulation of curriculum and textbooks. Simultaneously we need to list what the teachers can do and what they cannot do. This could be followed by a series of workshops on teaching methods, English and science teaching. We can see visible change in Bribhum and some work has also started in Malda, Jalpaiguri and Gopiballabganj' (interview, July 2008). In

other words, there is a fundamental need to improve teachers' capacity to be effective in the classroom as well as their ability to shape policies that affect schools.

Discussions across different directorates/boards and councils reveal that this lack of coordination and coherence means that important issues are lost sight of. The most pressing problem, highlighted in almost all discussions, is high pupil-teacher ratios. At a meeting in the Birbhum district DPSC, for example, council members and teachers said that the situation was extremely worrying.

Class size (especially Classes 5-8) is very big and there are almost 80 children to a teacher. This is the main reason for the high drop out rates. While some children resort to private tuitions, poor families cannot afford it. They barely learn anything. Teachers get frustrated – they cannot do anything about it and just cannot handle 80 children. Worse, the children are cramped in small, dark and dingy rooms. Given the no-detention policy till Class 4 the children come to the 5th Standard without any knowledge and while we realise that remedial is not enough, there is not much that we can do. Teachers have to start with alphabets and numbers.

A strategy like the Integrated Learning Improvement Programme (ILIP) can work, but the problem is that it needs close monitoring and also academic support. That is not possible because the vacancy rate in the Cluster Level Resource Centre (CLRC) is over 50 per cent and out of 32 CLRCs only 15 exist. Political will is also nebulous and there is no coordination between directorates/boards and the SSA Mission. The teacher and the school also get contradictory signals from the panchayat and DPSC (interview with DPSC Chairman, District SSA officials and teachers, Birbhum district, July 2008).

In **Rajasthan**, teachers flagged the politicisation of education and its impact on the school and the larger educational environment as a key issue. Teachers are vulnerable to regular mass transfers and can be assigned any duty by the district administration. Teachers with clout or political linkages can even be posted in the district collector's office for years on end! While civil work and construction of buildings has been quite effective in the state, rural and remote areas continue to have an overwhelming proportion of single-teacher and two-teacher schools. Rajasthan though home to several innovations in education, notably the Shiksha Karmi Project (1987-2004) and Rajasthan Lok Jumbish (1992-2004) is still grappling with basic issues.

Box 2. 1: What has changed in Rajasthan in the last 25 years?

Twenty-five years ago teachers were expected to teach the children and get results. Teachers used to focus only on teaching; they were not worried about transfers. But today teachers are worried about a number of non-teaching duties and also about transfers. Earlier the transfers were administrative, now they are political. Earlier the headmaster (HM) had a lot of powers; today the HM has no powers. The workload has gone up after the coming of DPEP. Administrative work has gone up because teachers have to gather a lot of data. Now, when there is a question the administrators send notices to all HMs to furnish information – they do not bother to look at the data that they already have.

There is a mismatch between the qualifications and subject specialisation of teachers and their appointments. A Sanskrit teacher is made to teach maths and vice-versa. The people doing the transfers do not care about the children or the school. The dismal situation of education in Rajasthan can be attributed to the fact that there is a mismatch between school level requirements and the skills and aptitude of teachers. There is also a mismatch between the training given and the teachers sent for the training – there is no planning for training. Teachers are deputed for other duties and many of them for a long time. IAS officers believe that most teachers do not do any work (teaching) so they give them other duties, believing that they are capable and educated. Many teachers are permanently deputed to work in the collectorate. There is a Government Order (GO) that the District Magistrate (DM) cannot

allocate work to teachers without the permission of the department but no one follows that GO. The DMs are kings; they treat teachers as their servants.

Now people in the villages are watching to see if the teacher comes regularly or on time but this kind of consciousness does not exist when it comes to learning. Even this change has come since 1998 or so. The other side is that from around 1998 teachers are expected to go door to door to give polio drops to children who do not come to the centre on Pulse Polio day. The community feels that the teacher is wandering. As a result the respect for the teacher has gone down.

(Group discussion with teachers from Jaipur and Tonk districts, February 2008).

A recent study points out that 'In Rajasthan, teachers' transfers were regarded as ways of "obliging" teachers who were close to powerful people, or were doled out as rewards (or punishment) for services rendered such as assistance in political campaigns. In some cases transfers were simply rent-seeking operations. The teachers had to pay a sum of money to get a preferred place of posting. (...) Both the major political parties had rewarded their supporters and punished the supporters of their opponents on assuming power...' (Sharma and Ramachandran forthcoming).

Both teachers and authorities thus utilise all available channels to manipulate the system for their own benefit, generating an enormous problem not only in Rajasthan but country-wide. As the following short narrative written by a teacher in the Kargil district of **Jammu and Kashmir** shows, 'teacher attachment' derails educational planning and sends a clear signal to teachers to 'network' with the powerful. In Kargil, teachers have found their own ways of influencing the educational and district administration to get themselves shifted out of locations that they do not find convenient. Therefore many schools in urban and peri-urban areas of Kargil are flooded with teachers, while there is a constant refrain that rural/distant schools face teacher shortages. In many urban schools, 'attached' teachers do not have much work to do. In fact, they need not even attend school every day, for there are too many teachers waiting to teach children! They then attend school on rotation.

Box 2.2: When teachers get 'attached' in Kargil

It is said that our district is behind others when it comes to education. There are many factors responsible for this. One of these factors is the 'defective' teacher transfer policy of our district. Teacher transfers, for instance, take place over the whole year in our district! The approach to transfer is neither systematic nor transparent. While the issue of teacher transfer demands attention, I will focus on the equally problematic phenomenon of 'Teacher Attachment' in this article.

'Attachment' refers to a temporary form of transfer... and it generally works for those who *do not want to work* in a particular area/school—they are then 'attached' to a school in a more convenient location, while they continue to keep drawing their salary from the other school...

In this cesspool of transfer and attachment, we are compromising our future and are instead choosing to continue our teaching under a blanket of darkness. The community/society cannot do anything but watch this 'tamasha' in helplessness.

Teachers who have political clout and influence are transferred to the urban and semi-urban areas of Kargil town. They invariably retire from such schools. Further, no lady teacher is ready to serve in schools that are more than 6-8 kms from the block headquarters. They seek roadside schools. But 80% of our population lives in rural areas, and that is where most of our government schools are. Only males are sent to these rural areas, even though the percentage of female teachers working in the district is more than 25%. This tends to affect

children's education, especially girls' education.

These problems are compounded by the innovative excuses that our teachers often cook up – for even the smallest, slightest illness, they get a medical certificate and get themselves attached or transferred to town schools or schools near their villages (...) Thus, you will always find a shortage in rural areas, and an excess of teachers in the town areas.

In Kargil, you'll find people from different traditions and cultures, who speak different languages. These include Purik, Shina, Balti, Dardi and Zanskari. This diversity of spoken languages also creates its own difficulties and challenges. It comes in the way of communicating with each other and understanding each other. Our officers do not consider these complexities in their enthusiasm for transferring and attaching teachers for their short term gains.

In such a situation, where many schools have become an 'adda' for the transfer and attachment of such teachers, even those teachers who want to work hard/well, are not provided the opportunity to do so. What is to become of those poor children who come to these schools? Their hopes and dreams are crushed....

(A teacher in Kargil Block, Jammu and Kashmir, April 2008).

(Source: Kargil Education Strategy Document 2008).

There are two principal problems with the issue of teacher transfers. The first problem, well-known and much-discussed, is that of institutional corruption: obviously teachers can only manipulate the system when the latter permits 'informal' (or corrupt) practices to exist. The second and equally important problem is that there are no *educational* criteria by which teachers can apply for a desired transfer. In other words, **if effective teaching practice (however measured) were linked to teachers' ability to access desired postings this could have the effect of both catalysing better teaching and diminishing the importance of 'informal channels' within the system.** This, of course, requires that educational outcomes be placed at the centre of the decision-making criteria affecting teachers.

Thankfully the situation is not as dismal everywhere. In **Tamil Nadu**, teachers' non-teaching duties are restricted to election and census duties. Unlike Rajasthan and many other states the DM does not have overarching powers over the teachers, and in 2006 non-teaching duties accounted for only 2.66 per cent of working days spent on educational work. **The government started transfer counselling in 1988 and for the past 20 years transfers occur only when there is a vacancy.** The chain of command is also clear and teachers are not expected to report to multiple authorities.

This was also echoed in **Kerala**, where numerous school-level support structures such as Parent Teacher Associations, School Resource Groups, School Support Groups and Local Resource Groups work actively with teachers, the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) and BRCs to promote 'lots of public debate' at the community level on educational processes and outcomes. The long history of public involvement in education in the state has been catalysed by the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) through its work on science popularisation since the 1960s. In the last 10-12 years, the 'People's Planning Process' has brought the panchayat to the forefront. Significant fiscal decentralisation has taken place, and the three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have played a key role in education as part of their local level planning and development processes. In Thrissur, for instance, the Gram and District Panchayats have come together to organise training

for teachers in different areas; the Panchayati Raj bodies pay resource persons and also bear the travel costs of teachers.

Administrators and teachers in Kerala felt that there is increasing recognition of the need to focus on the environment in which the teacher works, especially given that the nature of this environment clearly transmits what the education system 'expects' of her. A similar change has been reported in **Karnataka** and **Andhra Pradesh** where growing social pressure for good quality education has initiated serious thinking about the factors that enable teachers to work to their full potential. It is too early to tell whether these changes will be allowed to flourish and deepen to the point where their effects will be visible in improved learning outcomes among students.

Box 2.3: Teachers on the run!

Jaipur, 30 June 2008: Thousands of teachers transferred! On Monday the government brought out a list of 15,000 transfers of teachers in all the districts. Of this some 10,000 are primary schoolteachers and 5000 are middle school teachers (...) After the cessation of transfer during the last academic year, the government offices were fairly peaceful. But now teachers are making a beeline to the secretariat to meet ministers and legislators to either get the transfer revoked or to lobby for a better post (*Rajasthan Patrika, Jaipur*).

Bikaner, 2 July 2008: Many schools empty due to teacher transfers: Since the government transferred thousands of teachers—many schools in Bikaner are empty. There are no teachers. The Directorate has now asked for names of schools without teachers so that "vidhyathri mitra" can be appointed (...) Interestingly the name of a deceased teacher from Bharatpur figures in the list of teachers transferred (*Dainik Bhaskar, Jaipur*).

Malappuram, 19 July 2008: A primary school teacher died on Saturday after being beaten up, allegedly by a group of protestors from the pro-IUML Youth League who were taking part in an agitation demanding withdrawal of a controversial seventh standard social science textbook (...) The protestors also disrupted the meeting which was convened to share the academic experiences of teachers in the nearby schools, police said (...) The youth and student outfits of the Congress-led UDF have been on warpath for the last three weeks demanding that the LDF Government withdraw the textbook which, they alleged, contained portions meant to propagate atheism (*Press Trust of India, Thiruvananthapuram*).

Nandigram, 19 November 2007: Thirteen primary school teachers have sought transfer out of Nandigram (...) About 50 teachers had fled their homes during the last round of violence and taken shelter in relief camps and relatives' houses. "We have received a joint letter from 13 teachers seeking transfer. They have been asked to apply individually," East Midnapore Primary School Council chairman Narayan Chandra Mondal said (...) Sahadeb Gayen, whose house had been 'ransacked and looted by CPM cadres', had tried to go to Maheshpur Primary School on Wednesday. "But the CPM cadres did not let me enter and forced me to take part in one of their processions. I managed to escape back to the camp," said Sahadeb, who has taken refuge in Nandigram High School with his wife and three sons (*The Telegraph, Kolkata*).

How formal monitoring and supervision systems affect teachers' practice

It is said that *we learn what we are tested on and we do what is monitored*. This is the case with teachers too. If we look back over the last 20 years –since the National Policy on Education 1986– GoI has produced an impressive array of data. DISE was developed during DPEP to enable the government to track educational progress. What does DISE capture and how is this information collected?

According to the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), the institution that houses DISE, at the time of initiating DPEP in 1994, it was felt that a sound information system was essential for the successful monitoring and implementation of the programme. It was stressed that DPEP, with a focus on decentralised planning, required up-to-date and reliable school level information. In 1994, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) decided to design and develop a school-based computerised information system as a part of the DPEP national endeavour, the main responsibility for which was entrusted to the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi. Information on the following key variables over a period of time is now available at school, cluster, block, district, state and national levels:

- Key data on elementary education in terms of the number of schools, enrolment, and teachers, classified by school category and school management (also in respect of a few variables in case of rural/urban areas).
- Grade-wise and level-wise enrolment in each state.
- Examination results for the previous academic session for the terminal classes at primary (Class 4 or 5) and upper primary (Class 6 or 7) levels of education.
- Classrooms categorised into good condition, requiring minor and major repairs by school category.
- Number of schools by category and by type of building.
- Sex-wise enrolment of children with disabilities at primary and upper primary levels.
- Gender and caste distribution of regular and para-teachers and the proportion of teachers undergoing in-service teacher-training during the previous year.
- Distribution of regular and para-teachers by educational and professional qualifications and by school category.
- Enrolment by medium of instruction and by school category.
- Sex-wise number of students benefited by various incentive schemes at primary and upper primary levels.
- Performance indicators in terms of school category; ratio of primary to upper primary schools/sections; enrolment distribution: total, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, percentage female enrolment; gender-parity index; classrooms; single-teacher schools; schools with attached pre-primary classes; percentage of under-age and over-age children in primary and upper primary classes; apparent survival rate (up to Grade 5), drop out rate, retention rate and transition rate from primary to upper primary level.
- Quality indicators according to category of schools, teacher-pupil ratio; availability of female teachers; schools without female teachers, blackboard and building; percentage schools received and utilised school development and TLM grant; student-classroom ratio; availability of drinking water, common toilet and girl's toilet in school, etc.

By any reckoning this list is quite impressive. During August and September every year schools are expected to send information in specified formats to their cluster. This information is collated and sent to the block and then to the district, the state and finally to NUEPA.

Almost everyone engaged in education has found this information valuable. Yet, during the DPEP days there was a lot of debate on the reliability of this data, and comparisons between the results of 'system statistics' and those of sample surveys like the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) and the National Family

Health Survey (NFHS) led to growing cynicism about the validity of this information. Way back in 1996, Madhya Pradesh (MP) conducted a state-wide house-to-house survey (known as the Lok Sampark Abhiyan) covering 53,460 villages, 6.1 million households and 10 million children, which revealed that the situation with respect to primary education in the state was nowhere near as positive as was commonly believed. The problem of non-enrolment was found to be quite severe, especially in tribal hamlets with highly dispersed populations and for children from socially disadvantaged communities in non-tribal areas. The state government decided to act on it. More importantly, the survey data was alleged to have 'called the bluff' of system statistics and teachers were blamed for fudging the data.

Very soon other states followed the Madhya Pradesh path. For example, Andhra Pradesh carried out a similar survey to ascertain the number of out of school children and child workers. Gradually, by 2000, the household survey as a tool for educational planning gained official recognition and when SSA was launched in 2001-02, it was built into the programme as a precursor to the 'bottom-up' planning process. Ironically, teachers were made responsible for conducting the household survey. Remember Malati? She was expected to go from house to house to gather data but was later advised by her superior to meet the village pradhan and fill out the forms, making sure the number of out of school children went down.

Till the late 1960s schools were visited by a School Inspector (SI) who was supposed to interact with teachers and students, observe classroom sessions in progress, maybe teach one lesson, look at the notebooks to ascertain how much of the syllabus had been covered and so on. The older teachers we interviewed said that the SI's visit was an important event impelling teachers to make an effort to cover the syllabus. But things changed in the 1970s, and today one has a situation where there is no inspection: the cluster and block officials visit the schools to collect data and look at registers. For example, a study done by IIM Calcutta found that the SIs in **West Bengal** were overloaded and that it was impossible for them to visit all schools even once a year. The report noted that 'management and control at the ground level was almost non-existent and nothing was done even after the Ashok Mitra Committee recommended immediate measures to improve management of schools and supervision' (Chhattopadhaya and Reddy 2001). Teachers in **Rajasthan** said that schools located in rural areas, especially those that are not on the main trunk routes, are rarely visited. With the coming of the mobile phone, block level officials call to get information or give out the forms during monthly meetings. There are many schools that have not been visited for over a year and even when the BRC or the CRC personnel visit the schools, all they do is look at registers, especially those related to mid-day meals.

This observation corroborates the findings of an earlier study which found that teachers in sample schools spent a lot of time filling out forms and in single-teacher schools very little time was devoted to teaching. When the cluster resource persons who are meant to provide academic support to teachers visited the schools, they ended up merely collecting information. Sharma and Ramachandran (forthcoming) point out:

The supervision of schools indicated the same dynamic. On the one hand, supervisory officers told interviewers that they were engaged in so many tasks that they could not find time to supervise. On the other hand, discussions with teachers showed that when

they did supervise, they rarely went beyond checking records. A teacher's comment on the last visit of the supervisor was typical: *'He chatted with the teachers and checked the records regarding midday meals. He did not ask for any information about teaching or children's learning levels.'* (...) Concerns about TLM centred on the misuse of money, and not on obtaining and using relevant materials in the classroom. In Andhra Pradesh, a 'handbook' that listed various important questions and answers had been prepared at the district level. This was obviously a signal to the paper setters as well as teachers to focus on certain questions to ensure that too many children did not fail.

When formal supervision and monitoring systems do not engage with teaching and learning processes, the message that runs through the school system is that these do not matter.

There are, of course, islands of hope. There are instances where stricter monitoring along with effective on-site academic support has made a difference. A 2006 review of promising interventions from different parts of the country revealed that most of the successful interventions for improving the quality of education have worked around some generic principles (among others detailed in the report):

One, coming to terms with reality on the ground through a realistic assessment of the situation with respect to learning by teachers as well as their immediate superiors. This implies that the teachers and administrators acknowledge the problem and do not brush it aside. Acknowledging the problem in all its complexity and with all its imperfections represents a cognitive break with the past.

For example, when the Chennai Corporation began to look at the issue of learning levels in Corporation schools, it started with a participatory exercise where the 'maladies' in the educational system were identified by education administrators (Mahapatra 2006). This exercise revealed, among other things, that children's learning of basic academic skills was not ensured and that the teacher dominated the classroom all the time with little flexibility for children to learn or develop on their own. It was assumed that all children learn the same thing at the same time and in the same manner, leading to a failure to address the multi-grade and multi-level nature of a classroom. Teachers acknowledged that evaluation methods were not scientific and that neither the process nor the results fed into classroom transactions.

Similarly an intervention in Andhra Pradesh enabled the supervisory mechanism—meaning the block/cluster/mandal level academic resource persons—to directly test children and assess schools for themselves. Sharing this information at different levels highlighted both the scale of the problem as well the need for a collective engagement with reality. The Andhra Pradesh QIP (Quality Improvement Programme) and CLIP (Children's Language Improvement Programme) enabled both teachers and administrators to move away from impersonal numbers, grapple with the learning levels of children in schools and honestly share lessons with each other, including the Village Education Committee (VEC) and parents (Patni 2006a).

Two, creating open communication channels between education administrators/implementers and local officials, teachers, parents and children. This is more difficult in a hierarchical system, yet there have been fledgling initiatives that have demonstrated some promise. Assessment has always been a contentious issue feared by both teachers and administrators given its potential to 'expose' the real picture. At the same time, assessment of learning outcomes is integral to monitoring quality. It is in this context that the Learning Guarantee Programme (LGP) strategy of

communication in Karnataka provides useful lessons (Ramachandran 2006). Well before the programme was rolled out, the Azim Premji Foundation (APF) had already evolved a communication strategy with the help of professionals. From the beginning it was recognised that communication was essential to build trust, especially when working in partnership with the government on the one hand and local communities on the other. At the same time it was essential to reassure all stakeholders that participation in LGP was purely voluntary.

As in the case of the LGP programme, the strength of the Pratham initiative in Kutch (Gujarat) lies in ensuring communication with and accountability to the community through sustained dissemination of school data and the learning of children. The *Dhan Patrak* (the educational profile of individual children) is a powerful tool that enables parents to track the progress of their children. It is interesting that child profiles are now developed by many programmes and computerised child tracking mechanisms are much sought after; but the important issue is how these are positioned in the larger monitoring system and how they engage and support teachers and communities to bring about change. What the Pratham Gujarat experience shows is that information on individual children can become a powerful tool in the hands of the parents and the larger community as represented by the Shiksha Gram Sabha, thereby sending a clear message of what is expected.

Three, *energising the school system by supporting the teacher to improve classroom practice and assessment processes*. The ability of a teacher to teach creatively and make the classroom child-friendly is not only about teaching-learning materials and textbooks. It is inextricably linked to how the teacher is treated in the system, the autonomy she enjoys and her sense of accountability to children and parents. An important criticism of initiatives like DPEP is that these strategies were implemented in a self-limiting modular fashion. For example, teacher-training is not always linked to textbook development. The various dimensions of quality are rarely woven together. Treating each 'input' as a self-contained unit and not seeing the entire education process as an organic whole is a big handicap. Working *with* the teacher as the cornerstone in the process of change demands going beyond formal training and materials production—it starts with efforts to kindle self-motivation and enthusiasm of the teachers by appealing to their creativity and desire for satisfaction in their work.

QIP, a precursor to CLIP in Andhra Pradesh, used the accelerated learning method similar to the 'Learning to Read' programme of the Pratham Education Initiative, whereby a time-bound 45-day programme was introduced to enable children to learn to read and acquire basic numeracy and arithmetic competencies (Patni 2006). The drawbacks of this approach were soon evident. As the State Project Director, SSA explained, 'There was no visible change in the mindset of the teachers after the 45-day period of intervention. Further, it was also back to normal business for everyone in the system as soon as the 46th day dawned! What was required was a seamless and continuous intervention during the academic session.' CLIP moved away from a time-bound mode to one where the teachers were expected to use the techniques they had learnt in QIP all year round. This was backed by a rigorous monitoring system wherein all supervisory and academic support institutions were expected to visit schools continuously to monitor what was happening in the classroom. The important lesson from this initiative is that pedagogic creativity does not lead to appreciable change unless it is backed by systemic efforts to monitor learning rather than merely generating data on enrolment and transition.

Four, building a nurturing system for assessment and developing monitoring systems that create a continuous link between the school and academic and administrative support structures. The classic and well-documented example of a nurturing monitoring system was demonstrated in the Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP) in Rajasthan. The key to SKP's effectiveness lay in providing academic resource support to teachers and teacher educators in a manner that fostered creativity and respected teacher experience, skills and knowledge. Central to the success of the Shiksha Karmi Project and process was the training–review–monitoring system, which was also adopted in Lok Jumbish as the Review-Planning-Monitoring (RPM) cycle. Training programmes were contextual and need-based. The 40-day induction training was residential and participatory in nature. The conventional didactic training method, still used in the formal school system, was rejected in favour of discussions, self-learning and co-learning through exercises and a range of activities including songs, role-play and practice teaching. The induction training was followed by two 30-day training programmes in the first two years, 20-day training after two years and a 10-day training programme every year. In addition, the Shiksha Karmis (SKs) also participated in a two-day monthly review, planning and difficulty removal meeting.

SKP was probably the first significant attempt to involve research centres, not as external evaluators but as co-participants, in an ongoing and concurrent process for course correction and problem solving. The Institute of Development Studies and Sandhan (both Jaipur based) were involved in concurrent monitoring and support. Over the years a number of other organisations like Digantar, Urmul Trust, Sewa Mandir, Vidhya Bhavan, Bodh Shiksha Samiti and Sankalp were invited to participate, support monitoring and provide academic support and evaluation. What is noteworthy is that the monitoring function was not seen as an isolated activity; it was closely linked to participation in the selection of Shiksha Karmis, training, documentation and field support. This enabled the monitoring and support agency to tailor the training programme to the needs of the Shiksha Karmis and also follow through evaluation findings with concrete inputs in training and other field support inputs.

How ground realities affect teachers' perception of their role and objectives

Discussions with teachers around the country reveal that many experience nostalgia for the 'good old days' when they enjoyed high social status and were respected and looked up to by the community. Today, teachers are acutely aware of the negative perceptions about them as government functionaries who draw good salaries and, most importantly, as work shirkers who take no responsibility for the learning of children (Synovate and Azim Premji Foundation 2005). Their reflections on this situation generate a series of disturbing conclusions.

Teachers generally hold an idealised vision of the importance of the teacher's role in shaping future generations. At the same time, teachers today rarely view their objective as helping children learn. Rather, their objective is to follow orders.

The teacher is like a sculptor who moulds the future of students, backbone of society; they transmit cultures and traditions to students, inculcate moral values, provide guidance, etc. and have a significant role in preparing students as complete human beings in society (Synovate and APF 2005).

Let us contrast this statement with the responses obtained during a discussion with a group of teachers in a district of Rajasthan in 2004, during which we asked who a motivated teacher is. They said: 'A motivated teacher comes to school every day, does what he is told and provides information the higher-ups want' (Ramachandran 2005). In a similar vein, in West Bengal, in 2008, a group of teachers said that they feel they must work with dedication and show affection to the children, and of course teach them—that should be their objective. Yet they have no control over what they should teach and how they should teach. These decisions are taken at higher levels. Therefore, one teacher said, 'Our role is to follow orders and do as we are told.'

Critically looking at themselves, teachers viewed themselves as normal government servants, those who suffer from political interference and non-teaching duties, multipurpose government workers, who blindly follow rules and responsibilities laid down and who do not receive any training and capacity building for improving their teaching skills (Synovate and APF 2005).

'Orders from above', as we have seen earlier, typically have little to do with what children are learning—or how teachers are teaching. Thus teachers feel no responsibility for learning outcomes among their students.

Reflecting on a recent study where he explored who is a good teacher, H. K. Dewan notes that:

During discussions teachers said that a teacher was seen as being 'good' as long as she was sincere, regular, punctual and seen to be teaching the class. How she taught and engaged the children or what material and activities she used to make learning a fun experience was immaterial! This 'good teacher' could get away with almost anything if she abstained from excessive violence (beating) (H. K. Dewan in Sharma and Ramachandran forthcoming).

And if teachers are doing what they have been told to do, then it becomes easy to blame poor educational outcomes on other factors—like the family background of their students. Despite their idealised view of teachers and teaching, government school teachers often express resentment at having the traditionally high status of teachers jeopardised by having to teach poor and underprivileged children.

Another reason why quality is poor is because we have no control over who we can admit—every riffraff is allowed to be enrolled... (interview with a Madhyamik schoolteacher in Birbhum, July 2008).

The biggest difference between teachers in government and private schools is that the private school gets the cream while government teachers have to deal with 'kachara'—we have to teach children from kachi basti and slums and from the poorest classes (interview with a primary schoolteacher from Jaipur district, February 2008).

In a separate study that came to similar conclusions, Dyer (1996) sums up the situation as follows:

A majority of the teachers interviewed showed no critical awareness of the relationship between their pedagogical practices, conditions in schools, and teaching problems. Some teachers understood teaching as imparting the content of the textbook, regardless of whether children learn. In some schools, children who had attended classes for four years could still neither read nor write. The teachers did not accept responsibility for this situation and blamed the local environment: they did not feel that their own pedagogical practices required attention.

Thus, despite years of government policy statements promoting education for all, school systems transmit exactly the opposite message. The words of teachers quoted above offer damning evidence of the failure of school systems to put into practice what educational policy so ardently preaches. Rhetoric apart, teachers do what their day-to-day professional environment demands. The focus on rules rather than outcomes, the treatment of teachers as the bottom rung of government servants and the absence of mechanisms for teachers to even discuss the reality of their working conditions, let alone develop solutions to local problems all contribute to the attitude among many teachers that learning outcomes are not their responsibility; and that if poor or disadvantaged students do not learn, it is because of their own or their family's shortcomings.

Current trends suggest that many states have started holding teachers responsible for learning outcomes. Yet, as we have seen, they are given neither the tools nor the support necessary to do so successfully. This puts enormous pressure on teachers and at the same time the way the system treats them ends up undermining their position in the school, their self-esteem and confidence.

Some alternative models

Many people engaged with education, especially with teachers, believe that wherever teachers have the freedom to do things differently, when they have the confidence to take decisions and when they are provided an environment in which they can actually break out of the mould that they have been cast in they do better, and more importantly, the children do better.² The first step to becoming an empowered teacher is to feel good about oneself and gain the confidence to reach out to knowledge and skills. They then take pride in their work, take decisions in their own sphere and finally become their own critics.

For most teachers in the country, these conditions do not exist. But there are, once again, islands of hope. The **Activity Based Learning (ABL) programme** in Tamil Nadu provides one such example.

Box 2.4: How the ABL process transformed a teacher

SN was part of a group that visited Rishi Valley (RV) in September 2003. The group was expected to pilot the ABL approach in Chennai Corporation schools on its return. They stayed in the RV project (satellite schools) for five days, keenly observed the RV method and learnt much from their interactions with teachers and children. SN recalls:

- All children seemed to be engaged in learning – they were really learning, and it was not a show put on to impress us!
- There were only 30 children to a teacher, and not more. We liked this (...) both children and teachers were doing work. They were also doing whole class activities...
- No textbooks were present. On the other hand, each child had individual learning materials.
- The classroom not only had a blackboard for the teacher, but for the children as well, all along the wall. We found children using their own blackboards quite frequently for various activities.
- There were six sub-groups of children. The groups were fully supported by the teacher

² Interviews with Dr. Krishna Kumar, Subir Shukla, Professor R. Govinda, Dr. Sharada Jain, Rohit Dhankar, Amuka Mahapatra, Krishnan Master and YAP Rao between February and July 2008

(two such groups); partially teacher supported; fully peer supported; partially peer supported and; self-supported. We learnt that the fully teacher supported groups exist for the first 2-3 months after schools reopen; after this, only four groups remain.

Impressed by what it saw, the group returned to Chennai and went about the task of setting up similar ventures in their schools. Thirteen schools were chosen for the piloting of the programme. Four sub-groups were formed to prepare the ladder materials. They took three months to prepare materials for Grades 1 and 2, based on the competencies for these grades. Work in the classes and schools began a month following the RV visit. Each school had two teachers from the group that visited RV. The 13 schools were chosen in such a way so as to ensure that the teacher-child ratio was not more than 1:30. Parents were also apprised of these developments. They even had a ritual of sorts to begin ABL in school—there was the lighting of candles and prayers were recited for the success of the new method!

SN recalls that storage of materials was an issue to begin with. None of the 13 schools chosen had facilities to store TLM in such a way as to enable children to access them easily. Over time, storage facilities had to be created. More than anything else, it was the change in attitude of fellow teachers that SN recalls: 'Gradually, other teachers in our school stopped talking with me and V (who was also part of the group that visited RV). They were afraid of associating with us, as they knew that what we were doing would eventually need to be done by them as well. Nobody was prepared for this hard work! Some even tried to discourage us!'

SN and V started their work in Grades 1 and 2. They created two mixed groups of 20 children each, from both the grades. As soon as they began, they faced a problem—over 70 per cent of the children in Class 2 were at Class 1 (or below) learning levels. So, the groups had to be reorganised, as only 6-7 children could be retained in the Class 2 group. After one week, both the teachers found it very tiring. 'There were too many children who were stretching us in as many directions,' SN remembers. 'They were not working on their own with the cards...therefore the six groups had to be dissolved.' For about two months, they reverted to the original mono-grade arrangement.

'We wanted to take medical leave to escape this problem!' he says. But as they went on, they found solutions. 'Other teachers in the group, who had faced the same problems, had managed to find solutions,' says SN. 'These solutions helped us, and peer sharing was very useful. We went back motivated. We came out more confident and self-assured. Our doubts and despair were much less.' After three months, both SN and V found that children had started learning through this method. By the end of the year, many children moved back to their Grade 2 levels.

For the next academic year, the materials for Class 3 had to be prepared. Both the teachers had to also manage with children who were coming into Class 3 from classes that had not seen this approach the previous year. SN felt encouraged when one of the Class 3 teachers told him, 'The 20 students who came into my class from your Class 2, are far better than those who have come from other sections (...) at least they know the basics.' This was like a shot in the arm for SN and V.

(Interviews with SN and V, May 2008).

There are many instances where a strong social movement that involved teachers like the MV Foundation campaign to end child labour in Andhra Pradesh or the promotion of scientific temper in Kerala by KSSP or science education in Madhya Pradesh changed not only the self-perception of teachers but also the way they look at their work. In Andhra Pradesh, for example, the teachers believed that they should end child labour and get all children into school; this conviction was evident in areas where the MV Foundation had worked with teachers. During the tenure of a proactive State Programme Director and Secretary of Education, eradication of child

labour was viewed by teachers as an important professional goal (Patni, 2006). A similar spirit was evident during the heyday of the KSSP movement in Kerala. The teachers believed that they had a role to play in the propagation of scientific temper and in encouraging science education among children. This also happened in Madhya Pradesh when Eklavya and the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP) got the opportunity to work with government school teachers. Sustained interaction with Eklavya staff and engagement with science education created an environment where teachers were able to identify with the goals of science education.

There are also several instances that demonstrate that when a group of thoughtful and committed persons are given the opportunity to interact with teachers, work with them and provide academic support, teachers begin to set their own goals. This is evident from the work of a number of organisations.

Among the earliest groups to work with teachers was the **Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education (HBCSE)**, Mumbai. This centre (that grew out of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research) began working with the Government of Maharashtra in the mid-1970s on issues related to teacher-training and curriculum development for science subjects at both primary and secondary levels. Over a span of 25 years, these talented scientists worked on projects in different districts of the state, including some of the most remote regions with no facilities. HBCSE's hands-on, experiential approach to science education gave teachers the opportunity to understand concepts, teach children and observe their colleagues teach, come together and reflect on what happened in the classroom. Over a period of time the teachers not only became sensitive to learning processes but their subject knowledge also improved. This in turn enhanced their self-esteem and confidence. Teachers learnt a lot from each other and respected each other as professionals (interview with Dr. K. Subramaniam, Mumbai, February 2008).

Box 2.5: HBCSE: What we do and how we do it³

- ⇒ Always start with needs assessment—hands-on and in schools, with teachers. Understand the working conditions of teachers, their subject knowledge and their confidence to handle experiments...
- ⇒ Undertake a small project and work through it in order to develop a specific strategy and plan—this is the key to reflective thinking among trainers and teachers;
- ⇒ Do with teachers what you expect them to do with children—engage them in dialogue, enhance confidence, treat them as equals and partners in learning, familiarise them with technical language before you use it and link it with everyday life;
- ⇒ Organise enrichment sessions so that teachers can link what they do, not only with textbooks but with everyday phenomenon—kindle an interest in science;
- ⇒ Use technology like video to enable teachers to view their own teaching and learn from it; and
- ⇒ Training is just the first step—follow-up with regular interactions in the school, with teachers as a group and encourage them to reach out whenever they want to. Ensure you introduce systems for affirmation and for support.

³ These lessons are distilled from a review of HBCSE documents and discussions with faculty during March and April 2008.

The **Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP)** in Madhya Pradesh was started by **Kishore Bharati** and **Friends Rural Centre** in 1972 with 16 schools in Hoshangabad district and was extended to all middle schools in MP in 1978. **Eklavya** was set up in 1982 and it took up a science-teaching programme in 1,000 schools; the programme continued for 20 years until the government shut it down in 2002. As the programme started taking root it became evident that it could not succeed unless the teachers themselves were convinced about the need for change. This was indeed a tall order because school teachers are isolated from the world of knowledge, the world of enquiry and the world of science. The first challenge faced by HSTP was to encourage teachers to open up, speak out and be uninhibited and natural even in the presence of their administrative superiors. Teachers' self-perception as government functionaries at the bottom of the education ladder coupled with very little exposure to science and mathematics was a big barrier. As in the HBCSE experience, once the process was underway and teachers began engaging with the learning process, their self-esteem and confidence grew and their self-perception changed dramatically (Mukherjee 2007; *Science Today* December 1977).

Box 2.6: What HSTP was confronted with in 1972

The HSTP initiative was a response to the challenge posed by the conditions then prevalent in government schools and which unfortunately continue to be true in large measure even today. These may be summarised as:

- ⇒ A school, in a rural area or non-privileged area in towns and cities, is characterised by the fact that its building is poorly constructed, that it has no library, no laboratories, no equipment and no facilities. The teaching of science is usually done without performing any experiments and comprises a body of received knowledge being transmitted to children, validated by the authority of the textbook and of the teacher, who brooks no questioning.
- ⇒ Teachers are often untrained in science. They have no resources and enjoy no support from the system. They make no inputs to the curriculum and yet are expected to be the repositories and source of all knowledge. It is not surprising then that they adopt authoritarian modes of teaching.
- ⇒ Children are docile and submissive. This is almost a cultural imperative, one that dictates that elders have to be respected and their authority is never to be questioned. There are no rewards for showing initiative and independent enquiry by children is suppressed in the name of maintaining discipline in the class.

(Source: Dr. Vijay S. Varma, available at: http://www.icrindia.org/?page_id=52).

Subir Shukla, who has been closely associated with teacher development programmes of the government in DPEP and later with some state governments said that a bitter lesson that they learnt in the DPEP days was that there is an attitudinal hierarchy of learning. 'When we work with teachers, the first attitude that changes is about himself/herself. When they are able to break out of the low self-image, they realise that children are capable of learning. They realise poor children can also learn, children from deprived social groups can learn and they also come to believe that girls can learn. Teachers do not always have the emotional security to learn, therefore at each stage we have to give them the inner strength to move to the next stage. Self-image is critical, it is an issue of identity and when we tell them they do not know teaching they switch off' (interview with Subir Shukla, July 2008).

Summing up

When someone becomes a teacher she joins the profession with hope. Her daily experiences either energise her to reach out to every child or she gradually becomes disillusioned and indifferent. We have placed the blame at the doorstep of teachers for too long without trying to understand what makes them into what they are today. Yes, there are thousands of teachers who absent themselves from school, do not teach and discriminate against children from certain social and economic groups. There are also hundreds of instances where a supportive environment has nurtured individuals who have struggled against all odds to be true to their vocation as teachers. As Professor Punam Batra (2005) says:

Access to schooling, an adequate teaching-learning environment, an appropriate school curriculum and an empowered and inclusive teaching community are four crucial prerequisites of a school system that seeks to enable social transformation. While educational reform since the 1980s was strongly focused on the first two elements, the late 1990s brought the role of the curriculum into national focus. The critical link that binds these four critical elements together – the agency of the teacher continues to be cast aside, by political ideologies of most hues, contemporary curriculum reform efforts and the professional practices of much of the teacher education community.

III What is 'para' about some teachers?

In 2003, towards the end of the fieldwork for a project in a north Indian state, we chanced upon a group of young men and women who were standing in front of the Block Education Officer's (BEO) office. They looked agitated. They were talking about non-receipt of salary for over six months and wanted to know why they should work. We started talking, and over the next two days we heard the story of Ramesar and his colleagues.

Ramesar's story

Ramesar is a young man of about 30 years. He finished his high school several years back and subsequently completed a primary teacher-training course. He tried hard to get a job in the government but the concerned state government had (at that time) stopped recruiting regular teachers, having decided to recruit only contract teachers. When Ramesar could not find a job as a teacher he started working as a shop assistant in the local market.

In 1999 there was a buzz in his village that the government was planning to sanction a school in the nearby tribal habitation. He was informed by the village pradhan that he had been asked to recommend names of local persons who could work as teachers. Ramesar was overjoyed and he gave an application to the village pradhan. He wrote that he was willing to work anywhere – even in a remote habitation. He desperately wanted to be a teacher.

Ramesar was asked to report for an interview at the block headquarters and after a few rounds of tests and discussions he was offered the post of a contract teacher in the remote habitation. Soon after his appointment Ramesar attended the 20-day induction training in the district headquarters. He was then asked to report to the village panchayat that had identified a space for the school and had also prepared a list of 29 children who would enrol.

The first few weeks were rough. Ramesar had to clear up the space, meet the parents and ask them to send the children to school. He was shocked to note that several children had been pulled out of the nearby government primary school and enrolled into his school. The children were all from extremely poor families. As the months went by, Ramesar was able to procure textbooks for them and also persuade the village pradhan to supply slates and chalk. Over the next year, a thatched-roof school building was ready and Ramesar settled into the routine of teaching. He attended the monthly meeting at the cluster and also collected his honorarium of Rs. 1,500.

The euphoria that surrounded the new school died down soon. Ramesar did not get his salary every month and the pradhan would ask the teachers to find out from the cluster and block why the funds had not been transferred to the panchayat. Several months went by and there was no salary. He then heard that an association had been formed and there was a day-long agitation in the state capital. Then one day – on the second last day of the financial year – Ramesar was paid for six months. The erratic payments continued over the years. He heard that there were tribal areas where contract teachers had not been paid for over two years and he also heard of instances where nothing was paid during the summer vacation.

In the three years that he was a contract teacher Ramesar attended two training/refresher programmes for two days each. These workshops focused on how to fill out the household survey and other forms that were routinely handed over to them. There were a few lectures on 'joyful learning' and during one training session they had a one hour session on making teaching and learning material for children.

Ramesar had just heard that all the panchayat schools were to be made 'regular' upper primary schools. But the system of contract teachers would continue. It had been almost four years since he had been appointed as a contract teacher. His salary had gone up to Rs. 2,500 per month. Ramesar was fed up –he now had to teach 35 children from age 4 or 5 to almost 12 or 13 years. So he started off with the alphabets and numbers – and managed to go up to simple addition and subtraction and maybe a few sentences.

What does Ramesar's story tell us?

There is really nothing 'para' about Ramesar. He is qualified, having completed high school and a diploma in education; he works full-time – meaning that he manages the school for six hours. He attends the monthly meetings held at the cluster level and sometimes even in the block office. He fills out the same forms as his peers who work in regular primary schools. He is eligible to attend refresher training programmes like any other 'regular teacher'. He is also asked to participate in non-academic duties like local elections, Pulse Polio campaigns and drought relief.

How is Ramesar different from his 'regular' peers?

His working conditions are much more difficult:

- He is appointed on a contract basis, which is renewed every year (in some states it could be every three years).
- He is not a government servant.
- He gets Rs. 2,500 a month, while his peers who are 'regular' teachers take home almost Rs. 8,000 a month.
- His salary comes once or twice a year (roughly once in six months).
- He works in a remote rural area and cannot be transferred. He will remain in the same school as long as he and the government want.
- He is not part of the primary teachers' union – he is a member of an unrecognised association.

He also faces extraordinarily difficult teaching conditions:

- When he was first appointed, there was not even a school building – Ramesar had to push for its construction as well as for the provision of basic teaching-learning materials.
- Because he works in a poor, remote rural village, he works with first-generation learners. Family support for and understanding of educational processes is limited or non-existent. He had to persuade parents to send their children to school and keep them there.
- He has to teach in a multi-grade classroom, with students enrolled in Classes 1 to 8 all sitting together.

He is thrown into this situation without adequate training and non-existent support:

- In remote areas, teachers like Ramesar can be appointed after completing Class 10. In many states, para-teachers are not required to have a diploma in education.
- Ramesar received 20 days of induction training, by no means sufficient to teach children from Classes 1 through 8, even under better circumstances. In some

states para-teachers receive as little as five days of induction training (for example, West Bengal).

- He received TWO days of in-service or refresher training a year. Even these two days were largely spent on issues unrelated to teaching and learning.

Ramesar's situation is by no means unique. Although details may vary from state to state, what is clear is that para-teachers are wholly unprepared and poorly compensated for what is, by any standard, an extremely difficult and complex task: bringing education to first-generation learners in remote, poor and disadvantaged corners of the country.

Corruption makes the situation even more unbearable. In Rajasthan, for example, a single (para) teacher school was opened in a Schedule Caste (SC) settlement under the erstwhile Rajiv Gandhi Swarna Jayanti Patashala (RGSJP). An important political leader was appointed as the teacher. Although all the children from the settlement were enrolled, the school was almost never opened. In other villages also, RGSJP schools functioned irregularly as their teachers were 'too busy to teach' (Sharma and Ramachandran, forthcoming).

The para-teacher phenomenon is widespread and expanding all over the country, although there is a wide range of policies with respect to their employment. In some states such as Kerala, for example, a few 'contract' teachers have been appointed, supposedly as a purely temporary and stopgap measure. At the other end of the spectrum, Madhya Pradesh had (at one point of time – the current policy is not clear) decided to discontinue the appointment of regular teachers and even declared regular teachers as a dying cadre. In between these extremes we find Maharashtra, where all new primary level teachers are appointed on a three-year contract and with a low honorarium, even though their qualifications are the same as 'regular' primary teachers; after three years they are eligible for appointment as 'regular' teachers. There is also Orissa, where on completion of nine years on contract Sikhya Sahayaks can be appointed as regular teachers in primary schools against vacant posts with regular scales of pay. This decision was taken by the state government in 2007. Further, after completion of five years as para-teachers, their monthly remuneration increases to Rs. 3,600, which is equal to the basic scale of pay of a trained regular primary teacher with a diploma in education.

Table 3.1: Number of para-teachers/contract teachers, selected states (2006-2007)

	Primary	Primary with upper primary	Primary with upper primary and secondary	Upper primary	Upper primary with secondary	Total	% Women
Andhra Pradesh	24,355	21,045	3	0	17,920	63,323	44.85
Bihar	43,730	23,756	655	305	282	68,728	37.81
Karnataka	114	176	27	7	6	330	51.82
Kerala	736	987	215	255	240	2,438	74.45
Madhya Pradesh	75,597	20,794	3,499	17,910	1,403	119,212	30.56
Maharashtra	851	1,469	195	9	1,181	3,922	40.03
Rajasthan	24,384	6,700	647	37	404	32,172	26.87
Tamil Nadu	1,350	534	952	1,718	0	4,554	76.31
Uttar Pradesh	94,853	458	64	349	45	95,773	47.91
West Bengal*	1,345	26	135	746	6,942	9,221	49.42
India	330,389	94,810	9,285	32,610	31,444	498,944	38.68

Note: * Does not include *Shisu Siksha Karmasuchi* (SSK), *Shishu Shiksha Prakalpa* (SSP) and *Madhyamik Shiksha Karmasuchi* (MSK) as they do not come under the education department. (Source: Mehta 2007).

States like Kerala and Maharashtra which require the same qualifications for para-teachers as for regular teachers are, unfortunately, exceptions to a frightening trend. Merely opening a school and providing a person who is given the label of 'teacher' is to make a mockery of the provision of an educational service. A growing body of research and policy recommendations point to the futility of expecting untrained and unsupported young people to even have the subject knowledge, let alone the pedagogical skills required to teach. The story of Jhumur, a para-teacher in West Bengal, is instructive:

Jhumur's story

Jhumur is 45 years old and lives in a large village. There are different 'badi' in her village and they are often segregated by caste and community. There is one primary school in the main village but it is so overcrowded that children from her 'badi' find it difficult to get admission. In 1999 she heard that a local community school would be created by the Panchayati Raj department. As her husband was a member of the local CPM party cell, he had advance information about the school. She was told that they were looking for women above the age of 40 with a high school degree (Class 10 pass). She was expected to run a school in her 'badi' and the local panchayat was to help identify a space.

Soon after she was appointed as a Sahayika to the Shisu Siksha Karmasuchi (SSK) Jhumur was asked to attend a 5-day training programme which was conducted by a few retired teachers. The five days were quite uneventful – Jhumur heard many lectures and was given the syllabus and a set of textbooks. On her return from the training she was told that a group of elders would supervise her work in the village (SSK Management Committee) and that she would be paid an 'honorarium' of Rs. 1,000 per month. As she has a fairly large verandah in her house, Jhumur decided to run the school from her home.

It is now almost seven years since she started the school. Jhumur says that she has not participated in any refresher programmes. The panchayat has increased her salary to Rs. 1,500 because she is dedicated and opens the school for four hours every day. A retired school teacher visits her school once every few months, talks to the elders and encourages Jhumur to carry on.

Reflecting on her work, Jhumur thinks that she is lucky to have got this opportunity – now that her children are grown up, she says this is good 'timepass' – but immediately retracts her statement. When asked how much her students learn, she admits that they manage to come up to Class 3 levels. She adds that her math is rusty and she just cannot go beyond simple addition and subtraction. Her language skills are good. She finds it difficult to teach social studies and science – she showed me a chapter in the Class 3 textbook on feudalism and imperialism. Laughing out loud she said – this is party propaganda and I myself cannot understand these big words, quickly adding that some education is better than nothing and many of her students take private tuitions and enrol in the SSK only to be eligible to sit for the examination.

What sort of education are Jhumur's students receiving? Let us remember that Jhumur has only studied till Class 10, received all of five days of induction training, and has not participated in any refresher or in-service training. By her own admission, the content she is supposed to teach is far beyond what she knows or

understands. How to teach first-generation learners, in different classes, of different ages, and of varying ability levels is not an issue she has even thought about. Further, as SSKs do not come under the education department they do not get any ongoing academic support. Retired teachers and teacher educators who visit the school are encouraging, but do not address her needs.

Further, while the budget for SSK and MSK flows from GoI's Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, there is no convergence at the state level. That is, there is no ownership of these schools by the education department. The Sahayikas and the Samprasark/Samprosarika do not see themselves as being part of the larger teaching force of the state. Although the Planning Commission of India and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) showcased the SSK programme as a management innovation in 2005 (Planning Commission of India and UNDP 2005), the reality is that these teachers are resentful, their morale is low and they continue to work because there are no other jobs available. One madhyamik teacher who has been trying to unionise them noted:

The teachers' union in West Bengal only safeguards the interest of formal school teachers in government schools – they are not concerned about para-teachers or sahayika or those working in private aided or unaided schools. You see 90 per cent of the regular teachers are members of the CPM-led teachers' union and therefore they do not bother about us – we are neither government employees nor do we have regular jobs.

What implications does this have for teachers as a community?

As discussed in the Reference Annexure, **contract teachers/para-teachers slipped into educational practice without any policy level sanction**. DPEP project documents had made reference to the idea of contract teachers and promoted the practice in project schools, but the first major reference to the issue can be found in the recommendations of the National Committee of State Education Ministers (1999) which was set up to recommend the approach to be adopted for achieving Universal Elementary Education (UEE). It is worth reading the Committee's words on the subject:

Lack of community control over teachers, teacher absenteeism and low teacher motivation is often cited as reasons for not recruiting new teachers but for only concentrating on reducing wastage and internal inefficiency of the educational system. Even after making allowance for enrolment in private unaided and unregistered private schools, the teacher shortages are very significant. It is on this account that the recruitment of parateachers has to be considered a priority if all vacancies have to be filled up in shortest period of time. The issue of teacher/parateacher recruitment has to be addressed by all states as the long-term implications are for the states (...) for meeting the demand for teachers in a manner that the state can afford. Appointment of pay scale teachers to fill up all teacher vacancies as per teacher-pupil norms would require resources that state governments are finding increasingly difficult to find. The economic argument for parateachers is that provision of teachers as per requirement is possible within the financial resources available with the states. The non-economic argument is that a locally selected youth, accountable to the local community, undertakes the duties of teaching children with much greater interest. The accountability framework is well defined and by making the local authority as the appointing authority, the parateacher's performance assessment is the basis for his/her continuance. The quest for UEE as Fundamental Right signifies a certain sense of urgency in doing so. This urgency calls for appropriate modifications in National Policy in order to respond to local felt-needs. The recruitment of parateachers is a step in this direction.⁴

4 Government of India, Report of the National Committee of State Education Ministers under the Chairmanship of the Minister of Human Resource Development to Develop the Structure and Outlines

A few years later (2001) the working group for the Tenth Plan warned: '... In the recent past, there has been a move to decentralise recruitment and to make the teacher accountable to the local community of parents (...) Some of the newly recruited parateachers may be ill-equipped to teach—particularly beyond class 3. There is yet no long-term career development plan for these teachers. Consequently this situation could quickly deteriorate into low quality education...' (p. 102)

Notwithstanding the apprehensions expressed by eminent educationists and educational administrators, the number of contract teachers and para-teachers continues to grow.

So we have an expanding teaching force that is demoralised, paid far less than their peers for doing the same job (thus violating the constitutional guarantee of equal pay for equal work), insecure, not sure if their contracts would be renewed and poorly trained with little or no ongoing academic support. The quality of education has clearly taken a back seat. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the political leadership of the country is so wary of notifying the Right to Education Constitutional Amendment and introducing the Right to Education Bill in Parliament. The first practice that will be challenged is the phenomenon of different kinds of schools with differential investments for children—effectively making sure that the poorer and more remote a child is, the greater the chances that she will be unable to access a school that can provide her with a meaningful education.

Teachers we spoke to were categorical in their assertion that the introduction of contract teachers has been a huge blow to the teaching profession. In the absence of a pedagogical strategy which helps teachers to deal with diversity in the classroom, we expect them to do the impossible and they are designed to fail. How can we expect the most poorly-equipped teacher to deal with the most challenging of situations?

An alternative model

In fact, Rajasthan's Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP) demonstrated that achieving this objective is indeed possible—but only through a radical and system-wide reconceptualisation of teachers, teaching and training. SKP, which reached over 200,000 children most of whom were from remote and difficult areas and from very deprived sections of society, was conceived on the assumption that barefoot teachers belonging to the local community, once intensively trained and enjoying local community support, can overcome the lack of formal educational qualifications.

SKP adhered to a set of simple but non-negotiable principles/rules:

- SKP schools to open every day;
- Teacher to come to school every day;
- School to run for the full time, i.e., from 8 am to 2 pm;
- Every SKP school to have a minimum of 2 SKs;
- Request for a SKP to originally come from the community;
- Equal emphasis on skill and attitude of SKs in the selection process, this would be verified by the SKP Board;

- The teacher to report in a monthly peer group meeting (SKP, Sandhan and SKP-Board) on what she has taught, the problems she faced and what support she needed;
- Anyone who went to the school (even an inspector) had to 'give' something— activity/lesson etc.; and
- The training process would weave together experiential, emotional and conceptual aspects of teaching.

The lifeline of SKP was the selection, education and training of the SK. The first step was to identify remote and backward villages where primary schools were not functioning. The next step was to inform the concerned Panchayat Samiti about the SKP. After the members and other elders were fully convinced of the importance of education for their children, a meeting was called of all educated young people between 18 and 33 years of age in those villages. A minimum level of 8th standard was fixed for men and 5th standard for women. Interviews were held informally to begin with. Later all candidates had to take tests in writing and oral skills in Hindi, handwriting, knowledge of numbers and the basic processes, cleanliness, hygiene and the environment were also tested.

Of the other criteria for selection of SKs, the following were important:

- A positive attitude towards children;
- Excitement about a new chance to learn and to be a teacher; and
- High energy levels.

The most significant contribution of SKP was the training process. The initial training module lasted up to 50 days, supplemented by recurrent and advanced training programmes for 10 days every winter and 20-30 days every summer. In addition, the programme organised remedial training camps for weaker Shiksha Karmis. This was as important as the formal interactions and extension of support through Shiksha Sahayogis. The trainers were drawn from the existing pool of teachers, outside specialists from NGOs and DIETs and also senior Shiksha Karmis. To meet the goal of one male and one female SK in every SK school (the proportion of female Shiksha Karmis is currently around 12 per cent), the programme also set up Mahila Prashikshan Kendras (13) which trained 349 women as Shiksha Karmis. In addition the programme also trained members of VECs, both to help with school mapping exercises and to oversee the effective functioning of the SK schools, primarily in association with the Lok Jumbish project.

Table 3.2: Training cycle in Shiksha Karmi Project

Shiksha Karmi	37 days Induction Training (earlier 37 days or 50 days depending on the model being used – Sandhan or Sankalp) 30 days First Training 30 days Second Training 20 days training after two years 20 days training after two years 20 day Refresher Course in year five, six, seven and eight 2 days monthly review, planning and difficulty removal meetings After eight years, a SK becomes a Senior SK and can also become a Master Trainer
Master Trainers	In addition to the above – SKs selected as Master Trainers undergo 26 days of MT Training

Shiksha Karmi Sahayogi	10 days additional training
Mahila Sahayogi	1 day additional training
MPK Teachers	10 days quarterly training every year

(Source: Report of the Management Review of Shiksha Karmi Project, MSG, December 1997. Updated by Sharada Jain, April 2008).

The training programmes were residential and participatory, facilitating intensive interaction between trainees and resource persons. Training programmes were need-based depending upon the performance of Shiksha Karmis in previous training, work done in schools and test results. The training methodology was based on discussions, self and co-learning. It encouraged a participatory approach, positive acceptance and respect for Shiksha Karmis, self-discipline and social and gender equity and depended heavily on master trainers as role models. Special efforts were also made to attract female Shiksha Karmis and to reduce gender stereotyping.

The aim was to ensure that the training cycle enabled teachers to correlate their own experiences in the classroom with what was transacted in the training workshops—there was a back-and-forth system whereby the trainers and local academic support groups visited the schools, observed teaching practices and provided on-site academic support.

Notwithstanding the fact that the SKP training regime was accepted as a best practice internationally, the government did not try to emulate the model under DPEP and now SSA. The teachers we met in Rajasthan said that they still remembered the old SKP training—but now both they and others feel that the training system is all about fund utilisation. Some even said that teacher-training has become a lucrative business for people who are in charge.

IV Before she became a teacher...

Malati remembers few details of her teacher-training diploma programme, even though she studied at one of the best teacher-training institutions in her state – a government aided institution, where competition for admission was intense. She had to stay in the hostel because the institution was located in another city. She remembers enjoying the course although she had to work very hard. She can reel off the subjects she studied such as educational psychology and the history of the education system in India. But she remembers little of the content: once the examinations were over, she says laughingly, she forgot.

She remembers making many lesson plans. These had to be very carefully prepared, with good handwriting using different coloured pens. Five steps had to be followed in making them and the neatest and cleanest lesson plans would be proudly shown to visitors to the college. She also remembers the ICT (information and communications technology) class, in which they were supposed to learn how to use computers. But in her batch there were 40 students – and the institution had only five computers (more than most institutions, she proudly tells us). Plus often there was no electricity.

Malati has not made a lesson plan since the first week after she started teaching, she tells us. We ask her if her training helped her become a better teacher? She shrugs her shoulders and looks almost embarrassed. The problem, she says, is that in the Diploma on Education (D.Ed) they only teach theory. Real schools are not like that. Here one can't teach properly. The conditions are very bad. And many of these children aren't interested in learning. They don't even come to school every day. I try my best. But what can one do...?

Malati's experience in a teacher-training programme is far from typical—it is incomparably better than what most teacher trainees go through. Her teachers were dedicated, they prepared their classes, made students study and do assignments. Classes were almost always held. The institution's facilities were reasonably good. The institution was proud of its examination results and worked hard to maintain its high standards and reputation, with the result that as the Principal of the institution told us only the 'cream' of each year's batch of applicants got admission.

A central problem, of course, is that teacher-training institutions are judged by examination results. Both current students and government officials thought very highly of the institution that Malati attended—it was a 'serious' institution and a highly respected one. What happens to those who pass out and become teachers is completely irrelevant. The disconnect between certification and subsequent practice is absolute: one is 'theory' (needed to pass examinations), the other is work in the real world.

During the course of our fieldwork we went to a number of private and government teacher-training institutions. We met students who had chosen teacher-training by default and young women who were permitted by their families to enrol because their parents believed that they could juggle both home and work. We talked to teacher trainers and those in government responsible for teacher-training. The tragedy is that although working teachers and educational administrators everywhere readily acknowledged this disconnect between teacher certification and

the demands of real-life teaching, few questioned it. This situation is seen as 'normal'; the way the system works.

Over the last ten years there has been endless debate on pedagogy that is child-centric and activity-based. Yet, the students we met told us that the dominant mode was lectures. Their knowledge was tested mainly through periodic examinations. There was no group work and the teacher trainees had little to do with children or schools—except for a few practice lessons, which were designed in standard formats far removed from the reality of the school and not followed up by reflection. Concepts like 'child-centred learning', 'knowledge construction' or even the most misused of all terminologies 'activity-based learning' were studied and their definitions sometimes learnt by heart—but beyond that the constructivist pedagogy was never applied, either by their own teachers or in the practice lessons. It was just another set of facts to be received. The teacher-training curriculum provided few opportunities to draw linkages between subject knowledge and pedagogy: the two were distinct compartments.

In most teacher-training institutions, government as well as private, students said that their first choice of future jobs was in government schools. But teacher education programmes made little effort to address the conditions under which a majority of these schools operate—single-teacher and two-teacher schools, mother tongue education and the problems faced by children from communities that do not speak the dominant language.

The students themselves did not see the programme as a 'professional' course. It was just something that would help them get a job.

What we heard reinforces the observation made in the National Focus Group on Teacher Education (NCF 2005):

It is assumed that repeated 'practice' in the 'teaching of isolated lessons' (of a required number) is a sufficient condition for professional training to be a teacher. It is also assumed that links between theories of child development and learning, instructional models and methods of teaching specific subjects are automatically formed in the understanding developed by teacher-trainees (student teachers). Both national and international experience challenges these contentions. Teacher education programmes must therefore make a conscious effort to design courses to provide greater 'space' to generate a deeper understanding of such linkages.

Why choose to be a teacher?

Discussions with teachers and existing research suggest that teachers do not, by and large, enter the profession because of their love of teaching or of children. Rather, appointment to a teaching post is seen as a relatively easy opportunity to gain secure lifetime employment as a government servant. Given the low entry qualifications required of elementary school teachers and the relatively high demand for teachers, the option of teaching at the elementary level is accessible to students whose school leaving marks fail to qualify them to study to become doctors and engineers, yet who seek to obtain relatively comfortable working conditions in terms of salary, benefits, and job security. As the PROBE report (1999) summarises, '*Few teachers see their work as a vocation. In rural areas, teaching posts tend to be seen as plum jobs, with good salaries, secure employment and plenty of time for other activities. Anyone with the required formal qualifications may be tempted to apply, including persons who have no intrinsic attraction to the job, no sympathy for children, or no commitment to the spread of education.*'

Overall, it seems apparent that entry into the teaching profession at the elementary level is ‘...more of a “safe fall-back option” than a formal career choice. This bitter reality is rarely confronted in educational research and public documents that seek to eulogise the dramatic steps that India is taking to universalise elementary education’ (Batra 2005).

Box 4.1: Why did I become a teacher? Some responses from Rajasthan

I do not know how I became a teacher! I kept studying with my friends and colleagues (...) I kept doing what they were doing and now I am standing before you... Rural woman teacher

I can shoulder my household responsibilities along with this job. Urban woman teacher

Lack of employment opportunities – I was trying to apply for other jobs and also for the job of a teacher, but since I did not get a job elsewhere I had to take up this job. This job came to me by chance – I wanted to become an administrative officer. Rural male teacher

Because of poverty and family pressure, I had to begin work at an early age – this job was offered to me and came easily – I was only somewhat interested and wanted to be near my family so that I could help them financially and emotionally. Rural contract teacher

I did not want to work but after I got married my husband was posted in a remote place where I did not have much to do. So I applied for the job. I did a Bachelor in Education (B.Ed) and my marks were good. I had good contacts as my father was well connected. So I came to this job by just luck. But now I am enjoying it as the salary is good, I can buy things for myself and for the house. I have a lot of time on my hands and also it is non-transferable. For women it is the best profession as there is balance between family and job, not much tension from HM and good understanding with my colleagues. Rural female teacher

I was selected for the patwari’s job. During training I was told by the trainer that society always sees a patwari as a corrupt person even though he may be honest. I did not want to tarnish my image so I left the patwari training half way. Those days a teacher was seen with great respect in the community so I changed my profession. Rural male teacher

I wanted to work with children – teach them about Indian culture and history, so that when they grow up they develop a love for their country – give them a strong disciplined environment, motivate them, develop qualities like respect, determination, curiosity, self-reliance. Urban male teacher

(Source: Vimala Ramachandran field notes, Rajasthan 2003-04).

Who is eligible to become a teacher?

Country-wide, the eligibility criteria that govern who can be appointed as an elementary school teacher are related to formal credentials rather than to interest in or aptitude for the profession. While all states are broadly governed by National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) norms, there are significant differences among them, both in terms of academic requirements (number of years of schooling) and pre-service teacher-training. These eligibility criteria, given in Table 4.1, apply to appointments to regular teaching posts; appointment as a contract (also called para) teacher requires greatly reduced qualifications in most states.

Table 4.1: Eligibility criteria for appointment as a school teacher

State	Level of post	Academic requirement	Pre-service training requirement
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<i>Kerala</i>	Lower primary	10 + 2 with 55% marks	2 year Teacher Training Certificate (TTC) with 55% marks
	Upper primary	University degree with 55% marks	10 month B.Ed with 55% marks
<i>Maharashtra</i>	Primary	10 + 2 with 45% marks	2 year D.Ed + 6 month internship
<i>Rajasthan</i>	Primary	10+2	2 years Senior Teacher Certificate (STC) training
<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	Primary	10 + 2	2 years D.Ed
<i>West Bengal</i>	Primary	Class 10	(desirable) 1 year TTC, not mandatory

Academic qualifications

In most states the higher secondary certificate is the minimum entry qualification for primary school teaching – although statistics show that as many as 20 per cent of the elementary school teachers in India have not completed 12 years of schooling. Does completion of the higher secondary certificate ensure that teachers have sufficient content knowledge of the subjects that they are required to teach? Both research evidence and anecdotal accounts suggest the contrary. According to a World Bank (1997) report, for example:

Many primary teachers have not studied such core subjects as mathematics or the language of instruction beyond grade 8 or 10. (...) One study of primary teachers in Tamil Nadu found that only 39 per cent of rural and 53 per cent of urban teachers could correctly answer four of five problems on a short mathematics test. (...) In a study in Madhya Pradesh, teachers were administered the same tests of reading and mathematics as were administered to students in the DPEP baseline surveys. About half the teachers could not answer correctly a mathematics question (...) and could not identify the central idea in a paragraph that they read. Significant deficits in teachers' knowledge of mathematics, environmental studies, and Kannada language have also been reported in Karnataka.

Inadequate content knowledge among teachers often remains invisible at the lower primary level, since the no-detention policy and the textbook-based transaction of the curriculum combine to hide teachers' lack of mastery of content. However, current education policy in most states reflects the assumption that a higher secondary school diploma provides sufficient content knowledge for teaching at the primary level. Among the states included in this study, the entry-level qualification for a primary school teacher in Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan is the higher secondary certificate, increased from 10+/11+ to 12+ after the number of years of schooling was increased across the country with the coming of the 10+2 system. The pass percentage required of students wishing to become teachers tends to be very low. For example, Maharashtra requires minimum marks of only 45 per cent.

The educational policy in **Kerala**, however, reflects a more nuanced concern with teachers' subject knowledge. The state requires a relatively high pass percentage (55 per cent) in the Class 12 examination for teacher appointments at the lower primary level, and not only secondary but also upper primary school teachers must hold a university degree. At the other end of the spectrum, teacher candidates in **West Bengal** are required only to complete Class 10 (matric before the 10+2 system). In the

late 1970s and early 1980s this policy was perhaps driven by the fact that trained teachers were not available (given the huge shortage of primary teacher-training institutions) and also because a large number of educated youth were unemployed in rural areas. In the late 1970s, for example, as many as 20,000 teachers were appointed in one go.

It is illuminating to contrast the examples given above with the approach evolved by SKP in **Rajasthan** where as described in the previous chapter, men who had completed Class 8 and women who had completed Class 5 could become successful teachers through an extensive and thoughtful process of continuous training and support. SKP's focus lay not on whether individuals could demonstrate adequate certification, but rather on the attitude and interest displayed by each individual towards the educational process.

Box 4.2: Who is a teacher: A factual question or a conceptual question?

Starting point of SKP, Rajasthan

Factually, a teacher is one who is appointed as a teacher

- And, she/he can be appointed only when she/he has a basic certification for competency
- But, 'teachers' may not be actually teaching (teacher in name)
- And, even when they are teaching, they may not be teaching well i.e., children may not be learning

Conceptually, a teacher is a person who actually effectively teaches (Shikshak Dharma)

For this:

- Teachers must want to teach
- They would want to teach only when teaching becomes a satisfying activity
- It could become a satisfying/energising activity if teachers actually experience learning at their own level, a growth within

Hence

- A teacher, in order to remain a true teacher, must want to learn
- Must enjoy expressing what has been learnt
- Must love the transaction process: it should be energising
- Must experience love and nurturing in order to believe in it

Concept of a Teacher in SKP

From the question who 'is' a teacher, the issue was who 'can become' a teacher. What kind of process is required to ensure that teachers are

- present in the school
- learn the subject well
- learn pedagogic techniques
- love children, care for their pace of learning
- experience ongoing empowerment at the personal level

Assumptions

- Every 'ordinary' person has some extraordinary potential
- Capacity building is not a one-time activity

Requirements

- Small doses of inputs, continuous and predictable support
- Ongoing follow-up
- Heavy investments in human resource over a long period

(Source: Interview with Dr. Sharada Jain, April 2008).

Pre-service teacher-training

At the pre-service stage, teacher-training programmes aim to ensure that future teachers have the knowledge and pedagogical skills that would enable them to teach in elementary schools. Such training is required for appointment as an elementary teacher in four of the five states included in this study: Kerala, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu. The duration of this training is typically two years, although in Maharashtra it has recently been extended to include a six-month internship above and beyond the two years of training.

West Bengal, once again, has followed a different trajectory; only in 2002, under pressure from GoI/SSA/NCTE, did the state government agree to make diploma in education a desirable—though still not required—qualification. Given the overall employment situation in the state, teacher posts are in great demand and there is a great deal of resistance to making a certificate course mandatory.

In every state, diploma or certificate courses in primary teacher-training are conducted by government, government-aided as well as private (self-financing) institutions. While the duration of the courses and the actual certification they give differ across states, the important issue that frames the teacher development debate has to do with the content and process of pre-service teacher education. Almost all important review committee and commission reports as well as independent analyses have highlighted the poor quality of teacher preparation in India (see Reference Annexure for a list of committees and commissions from 1986 to the present). It is not necessary to labour this point further—**the question is why have the states not been able to do anything about it?** We look below at three interrelated aspects of this issue: teacher-training institutions, process (training content and methodology), and faculty.

Teacher-training institutions

Country-wide, teacher-training programmes are offered increasingly by private (self-financed) rather than by government institutions. There are two related problems with this trend. The first relates to state governments' ability to regulate what these institutions do; the second to the complete mismatch between the numbers of students completing this training and the numbers actually required to fill available vacancies.

Central to this situation is the role of the revamped NCTE, which became a statutory body in 1993 to promote 'planned and coordinated development, regulation and proper maintenance of norms and standards in the teacher education system throughout the country' (NCTE Act 1993). It has both academic and regulatory functions. Its academic functions include conducting studies on teacher education, recommending strategies for teacher education, promoting innovations and research in teacher education and formulating schemes and identifying recognised institutions for teacher development programmes. The regulatory functions include according recognition for teacher education institutions and courses, laying down guidelines for compliance, laying down norms for courses and minimum eligibility criteria, evolving an appraisal system and 'taking all necessary steps to prevent commercialisation of teacher education' (GOI and NCERT: Draft NCTE Review Committee Report 2008).

Notwithstanding the laudable objective behind creating NCTE, the last 15 years have witnessed a haphazard growth of teacher education institutions across the country – often against the judgement of state level bodies and state governments. In the states included in this study, the effects of these developments have been resoundingly negative. In **Maharashtra**, for example, the D.Ed programme is offered by primary teacher-training institutions which, towards the mid-1970s, were fewer than 100. By February 2008, there were 787 such institutions, of which 130 were government or government-aided institutions (33 DIETs and 97 aided D.Ed colleges), whereas the rest – over 85 per cent of the total – were self-financed or unaided colleges.⁵ The state currently generates between 60,000 and 70,000 trained D.Ed teachers every year, about five times the annual demand (Table 4.2).⁶

Table 4.2: Expansion in D. Ed institutions, Maharashtra

Year	Total number of D.Ed institutions in the state	% increase
1965	79	
1975	94	19
1985	126	34
1995	210	67
Feb 2008	787	275

(Source: 1965 to 1995: Adapted from MSCERT, Teacher Education in Maharashtra. Current Status, Issues, and Future Projections. New Delhi, NCTE (2001) (excludes 31 institutions whose year of establishment was not specified). 2008: Data provided by MSCERT).

Table 4.3 Expansion of private teacher-training institutions in TN

Year	Type of Institution				Total
	DIET	Government TTI	Govt. Aided TTI	Unaided TTI	
2003/04	29	9	43	2	83
2004/05	30	9	43	126	
2005/06	30	9	43	415	
2006/07	30	9	43	477	
2007/08	30	9	43	583	665

(Source: DTERT, Chennai 2008).

The situation in **Tamil Nadu** is not very different. In 2003–04, there were only 83 TTIs (including 29 DIETs) with a maximum intake of 8,300 teacher trainees. Since then only one new DIET has been added, which means that the increase in the numbers of TTIs has been entirely in the unaided sector (Table 4.3). A similar scenario can be traced with respect to B.Ed colleges, whose number is nearly 300 in the current year.

Table 4.4: Kerala teacher-training institutions

Year	Type of Institution/course	
	TTC Course (DIET + TTI)	B. Ed Course

⁵ At the time of fieldwork in February 2008, close to 100 additional private institutions had been sanctioned by the National Council for Teacher Education, but had yet to begin functioning.

⁶ Estimates provided by functionaries at the Maharashtra Council for Educational Research and Training (MSCERT).

1992-93	101	78
2006-07	210	247

(Source: NCTE, Selected Educational Statistics, 2006-07).

In **Kerala** also, the past several years have seen an uncontrolled increase in the number of private institutions that prepare teachers, in particular private unaided colleges (Table 4.4). Given Kerala's declining birth rates and an average annual retirement rate of 5 per cent the state would require no more than 8,000 teachers every year. Yet, these institutions combined produce at least 4-5 times that number every year.

This unchecked expansion of self-financed primary teacher-training institutions since the mid-1990s has generated a series of new problems for the states' educational systems. On the one hand, the expansion in teacher-training institutions contributes to increased opportunities for higher education and employment within the state; on the other hand, these new institutions, oriented towards private profit, rather than the public good, have created new issues of economic equity and educational quality which the state has neither the capacity to monitor nor, despite a protracted legal battle, the authority to resolve (for an in-depth discussion of the privatisation of higher education in India, see J.B.G. Tilak 1999).

Different individuals interviewed during the course of this fieldwork cited innumerable instances of corruption in establishing and operating these institutions. To cite only a few examples: a few years ago, a seat in a private D.Ed college in Maharashtra reportedly required a Rs. 3 lakh 'donation'. However, given the excess supply of trained primary school teachers and the consequent difficulties in obtaining employment after completing D.Ed, this price has reportedly come down to Rs.1 to Rs.1.5 lakh currently. Private teacher-training colleges are known to include faculty already employed elsewhere on their official paperwork, but actually use B.Ed rather than Master of Education (M.Ed) graduates to teach their courses, often borrowing these from other institutions as needed. Multiple instances were also cited of institutions receiving permission to operate half way through the academic year and then cramming the syllabus into the remaining number of days in order to be able to examine students in the same year. Stories of inadequate infrastructure and facilities abound. There is no regulation and no parameters by which the quality of these institutions can be measured; neither is there accountability.

A separate issue has to do with the isolation of institutions responsible for teacher-training at the primary level. In all states included in this study, these institutions fall under the purview of the relevant State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) and are thus completely isolated from contact with centres for higher education, intensifying the perception of primary education as an area requiring few skills and little knowledge. Teacher-training for secondary education, in contrast, normally consists of the B.Ed degree which is offered by university faculties.

Content and process

Another glaring lacuna is that the NCTE has not been able to modernise the teacher education curriculum. While a national curriculum framework for teacher education

was first developed in 1978 and then updated in 1998 and again in 2005, the focus remains on rote-based learning.

The transactional approach has remained confined to the lecture method with little scope for trainees to actively participate in the training process (...) the conventional teaching approach adopted by NCTE trains teachers to 'meticulously' plan lessons in standardised formats, fill the ritual of delivering and supervising the required number of lessons as also the ritual of completing the required number of written assignments and projects. The conventional approach also presumes that repeated practice of teaching isolated lessons is sufficient for the professional training of teachers (NCTE Review Committee 2007).

Despite major reviews and changes in some states, attempts to reform teacher-training programmes have run into major hurdles, both conceptual and logistical. A brief history of a recent initiative to reform the D.Ed curriculum in **Maharashtra** is instructive. In 2001, MSCERT decided to revise the D.Ed curriculum in light of the 1998 framework for teacher education released by NCTE. The committee established for this purpose decided to use a 'different method' for designing the curriculum. It decided to 'keep aside the old syllabus, and think about how we want our teachers to be'.

In particular, three aspects of the new curriculum represent a significant departure from earlier practice:

- Integration of content and methodology in the teaching of school subjects (languages, mathematics, science, etc.) with the objective of getting D.Ed students to study each subject in terms of the concepts to be taught to their future students at each level, rather than simply memorising a series of facts to be transmitted.
- Inclusion of a paper on 'action research' – defined as the application of the scientific method to the resolution of a problem faced or observed by the researcher (student) during the course of teaching. Every D.Ed student is required to undertake an action research project during the two years of coursework.
- Inclusion of a six-month internship after the two years of coursework, as a requirement for D.Ed.

The Government of Maharashtra approved the new D.Ed curriculum in 2004 and implemented it in all D.Ed colleges as of 2005, the same year in which the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) was released. Evidently, therefore, the new curriculum bears no reference to NCF 2005, drawing extensively on earlier national level documents (NCF 2000 and the Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education 2002). In 2005 state-wide orientation was given to all colleges of education, in the form of a training workshop. However, the rapid expansion in the number of teacher-training colleges implies that many institutions have not had the opportunity to attend even this orientation. Since then, no follow-up has been done to find out how the colleges are coping with the very extensive changes made to the curriculum.

The new D.Ed curriculum includes a large amount of radically new content, for which teacher educators are ill-prepared. Particular problem areas cited by teacher educators include 'action research', 'models of teaching', 'psychology experiments', 'gender sensitisation', and 'ICT in education'. At the request of the D.Ed colleges, a variety of institutions such as DIETs, B.Ed colleges and Institutes for Advanced Study in Education (IASE) offer sporadic and ad hoc training workshops for D.Ed faculty. Yet, there is no coordination of content or scheduling between the different

institutions offering training, nor even the possibility of planning training workshops ahead of time. In the case of IASEs, although some workshops were held during the last financial year, funds had yet to be released by MHRD during the current year for this activity.

Teacher educators at D.Ed colleges, themselves often poorly equipped and working in institutions with inadequate infrastructure and facilities are thus left to struggle with a host of problems, both academic and administrative.

On the academic side, the implications of the new curriculum relate to new content on the one hand and excessive activities and demands on the other. With regard to content, D.Ed faculty complain that using the 'content-cum-methodology' approach to teaching subject papers is a major problem. Given the limited time available and the fact that students (and, sometimes, teachers) have inadequate content knowledge to begin with, the higher-order analyses required to implement this approach appears to ignore the ground realities of both teachers and students in D.Ed institutions: '*They should teach this in B.Ed, not in D.Ed*' is a common opinion.

Additionally, the new emphasis on practical work both within coursework and during the internship requires additional time, infrastructure and planning that leads to a heavy burden on D.Ed faculty. For example, in addition to teaching the theory components of the programme, D.Ed faculty have to provide individual guidance for about 200 practice lessons per year; organise 20 practical sessions per student which require individual checking and orchestrate an 'annual lesson' for each student each year, which is required to be observed by two external observers. From the point of view of the students, many of the practicum components of the new curriculum – the practicals, practice teaching, internship – require a lot of extra expense (travel, TLM, etc.).

On the administrative side, the new curriculum has generated a host of problems that are difficult to resolve. To give just one example, the logistics involved in implementing the new 'annual lesson' requirement are staggering. In Pune district alone, for example, about 3,500 final lessons have to be scheduled each year, which in turn requires finding and scheduling 3,500 classrooms and 7,000 qualified external observers. A potentially powerful mechanism for connecting theory and practice thus becomes yet another requirement to be completed.

But the area of by far the most intense conflict over the new curriculum relates to the new six-month internship requirement for obtaining the D.Ed. Four distinct areas of discord can be identified with respect to this issue:

- First, faculty at DIETs, aided and private teacher-training institutions say that a six-month internship 'is not necessary'. They feel that the D.Ed coursework includes more than enough practice teaching; therefore the internship serves only to teach students school 'routine'. All faculty members interviewed agreed that 'two years is more than sufficient – we don't want students to work extra time'.
- Second, the internship requirement leads to new avenues of corruption. For example, school authorities ask for money before signing paperwork.
- Third, interns placed in schools are often not allowed to teach, but are instead made to do all sorts of other administrative and clerical tasks, thus defeating the purpose of the internship.
- Fourth, the 6-month extension to the D.Ed programme creates a huge problem with regard to hostel facilities for students. Because hostels are geared to

accommodate students only for two years, interns have to leave the hostel to accommodate incoming first-year students and thus incur substantial expenses for boarding and lodging during these six months; in addition there is also the issue of security faced by women students.

Becoming a teacher is now like becoming a doctor, or an engineer. The D.Ed lasts two-and-a-half years. By the time the internship is over, the last date for applying for a teaching post is over, so we have to wait almost another year before we can get a job. Then for three years we have to work as Shikshan Sevaks (contract teachers). So it takes almost seven years before we can get a proper job (group discussion with 2nd year D.Ed students in Pune).

The Maharashtra story described above may differ in detail from experiences of other states but the essence remains the same: teacher certification programmes, usually developed by experts with no experience of teaching at the primary level, provide just that – certification, rather than any sort of meaningful engagement with teaching and learning. A huge opportunity is wasted as the preoccupation with numbers (of institutions, of students, of marks obtained in examinations) leaves issues of quality and relevance completely invisible. Is this the best we can do?

Teacher-training faculty

The answer to the above question depends in part on the nature of the curriculum designed for teacher trainees, as described above. But even the most thoughtful and innovative curriculum finally rests on the ability of those implementing it – the cadre of teacher educators available in each state. It seems self-evident to say that a curriculum which does not take the skills and abilities of teacher educators as its starting point is doomed to failure from the start. But just as teachers' real training needs are ignored by teacher-training curricula, so too is the vital role of teacher educators sidelined by the education policy in every state. As pointed out in NCF 2005, 'There is no established mechanism to create a professional cadre of teacher educators, especially at the pre-primary and elementary stage. Most teacher educators training pre-primary and elementary school teachers are themselves trained in secondary education'.

Let us look once again at the situation in **Maharashtra**. Given the phenomenal expansion in D.Ed colleges in the state over the last decade, the availability of teacher educators has become an issue of major concern.⁷ Teacher educators are expected to have, at minimum, an M.Ed degree; but the state does not produce qualified candidates either in sufficient numbers or of adequate quality, to the point where current M.Ed students often obtain jobs even before completing their degree. New M.Ed and M.A. (education) programmes have been opened in a number of institutions, both government and private,⁸ including in the distance mode, but given that most of these programmes lack a practical component and are oriented chiefly towards examination results, the relevance of this degree for the training of primary school teachers is questionable, even more so in the light of recent changes in the D.Ed curriculum. As one interviewee put it: '*Qualified*' teacher educators know

⁷ This discussion is based on interviews conducted during March 2008 with concerned individuals in a number of settings: the Department of Education, universities, non-governmental organisations and teacher-training institutions.

⁸ Earlier, private colleges were not allowed to offer the M.Ed programme because the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) accreditation required the availability of separate staff for B.Ed and M.Ed, a requirement that was removed 3 or 4 years ago.

only about textbooks and nothing at all about teaching. They just have to pass M.A. and SET/NET to get a job.

Similarly in **Tamil Nadu**, vacancies for faculty members exist in private institutions. The qualifications and abilities of faculty members are in doubt. The few who teach in such institutions are not qualified for the job, since they have not worked with children nor in schools—how then can they train future teachers? By and large, classes are sporadically held and certificates of course completion are issued ‘just like that’. Student evaluation leaves much to be desired; it does not engage the application of a student’s knowledge and there is also mass copying.⁹ Participants in a discussion at the state level felt that such a state of affairs can only perpetuate the ‘bankruptcy’ in teacher education.

He who knows not and knows he knows not, and could not care a damn!

It is not that politicians, administrators and educationists are unaware of the dismal state of pre-service education. Over the last 30 years numerous delegations have visited other countries, interacted with educationists and may have even studied good institutions. Nevertheless, the sad truth is that people with the ability to shape teacher-training curriculum have not had much chance to make a dent into the system. In the wake of NCF 2005 a new pre-service teacher-training curriculum has been drafted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The document still needs to be discussed and debated so that a core group of people can be formed in every state who will then be given the responsibility of revamping the curriculum and also linking it with universities on the one hand and practicing teachers on the other.

Box 4.2: Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education 2006

NCF 2005 presents a fresh vision and a new discourse on key contemporary educational issues. We now need to define the path that can be taken to empower individual teachers who can then empower individual learners...

The education of teachers not only facilitates improvement of school education by preparing professional, competent teachers, but also functions as a bridge between schooling and higher education. The mechanism that can help create a cadre of professional school practitioners who can not only teach in schools but can also develop further to become teacher educators can be laid only when school teaching has intimate links with the system of higher education...

There exists a wide variation in the status of teachers and the need for teachers at different levels of school education across the country. It is important to develop a broad framework that can address some of the crucial issues common to teacher education across different levels with a view to enable states to respond to needs specific to their contexts. Within this it would be necessary to develop an informed understanding of who comes to be a school teacher at the elementary and secondary levels through profiles of the existing cadre of school teachers, their qualifications and training status. Moreover, the diversity in the institutional arrangements for elementary education in terms of alternative schools, government and private schools places its own demand and will also need to be addressed. Diversity also exists in terms of the set of agencies that conduct teacher education programmes...

The vision of teacher education should be in keeping with the vision of a teacher and

⁹ Discussions with administrators and teacher educators at an apex institution in Chennai and senior teachers, June 2008

school...

The making of a teacher involves a process of development of a beginner into an equipped professional...

Just as the curriculum of school education is to be based on an adequate understanding and articulation of the way in which children learn and develop, the curriculum of teacher education is to be based on an understanding and articulation of the way in which adults learn and develop (...) Adult learners are *autonomous* and *self directed*, have a vast amount of *life experiences* and *knowledge*, are inclined to be *pragmatic* and *goal-directed* and respond better to learning if learning is problem/life/task-oriented....

In the light of the above, the following would emerge as implications for teacher education: teaching needs to be problem oriented and not discipline or theory oriented; approaches such as case studies, simulations, role-play and action research would be more appropriate for the professional development of teachers; emphasis of instruction should not be memorisation of content but accomplishment of tasks, insights, competence; open-ended activities and questions could bring out the vast experiences of prospective teachers, as also their 'personal theories' about knowledge, learning and learners for scrutiny and analysis...

Some worthwhile models exist in the country—the Bachelor in Elementary Education programme (B. El. Ed.) in Delhi University, the newly introduced M.Ed programme in education at TISS, the Digantar endeavour to develop a programme for teacher education and, of course, the painstaking process adopted during the early days of SKP to not only identify young people with aptitude but to also gradually nurture, teach and train them to become teachers. In the last five to ten years several private as well as not-for-profit institutions too have tried to create a new genre of teacher-training institutions. However, regulatory roadblocks have frustrated such efforts. At one level the government (meaning NCTE) wants to monopolise the entire teacher education space in the name of safeguarding quality and preventing 'commercialisation'. At the same time large numbers of teacher education institutions of questionable quality have mushroomed across the length and breadth of the country.

While it may be easy to lay the entire blame at the doorstep of regulation that went sour and ended up becoming the biggest stumbling block, the reality is that all stakeholders have been party to this sorry state of affairs. The quality of teachers who come out of institutions and universities is a sad reflection on the state of higher education in India. The key issue is not that there are no tried and tested approaches either in India or in the world. It is that **teacher preparation has never received the kind of attention it merits either from the elementary and school education sphere or in higher education.**

This is one area where teachers themselves can do little—but what the system does has a devastating impact on the overall quality of education in the country. There have been two major consultations on teachers in the last four years—one organised by the Aga Khan Foundation in Hyderabad in August 2007 and the other by the Azim Premji Foundation in Bangalore in October 2005. Teachers, teacher educators, administrators, educationists, researchers and social activists came together to share their concerns and also find ways to improve the situation. The overwhelming message from them was that a radically new strategy is called for and tinkering with training programmes and piecemeal reforms will not do.

The way forward cannot but involve thinking differently about how we prepare our young people to become teachers. This is a domain where a lot could be done, yet this is one area that has remained neglected. Breaking an insular approach to teacher education and forging close linkages to graduate and post-graduate courses on the one hand and rural and urban schools on the other is the natural starting point.

V Training! Training!

In the heartland of India

It was the summer of 2005 and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was in its third year of implementation when a senior official of a north Indian state asked one of us to accompany him/her on a tour of summer training of teachers. We were to drive from the state capital and cover four districts over a 5-day period.

The SSA directorate had prepared the module, which was available in printed form. It covered a range of subject-specific 'hard spots', material on child-centred learning (what the trainers called joyful learning) and tracking out of school children through household surveys. The District Collectors had been informed about the training programme and its importance in quality improvement. The SSA directorate had sent out detailed instructions including the schedule of training sessions, the sequence in which they should be conducted and, most importantly, that these training programmes were to be residential. DIET and BRC were involved in making arrangements, identifying resource persons and disbursing the funds. SCERT had perhaps been involved in the preparation of the module, but the decisions were clearly taken by the SSA directorate. Career civil servants were in charge and professional teacher educators were assisting the administrators.

What we saw on the tour was an eye opener.

The first stop was a high school where 200 teachers were supposed to come together in batches of 40 each for a 6-day refresher training programme. We walked in to find that there were three or maybe four batches of 25 to 30 teachers listening to lectures. We looked around and found that there were maybe 100 teachers of whom very few were women.

As my companion got busy with administrative matters, I wandered off to talk to the teachers. All of them had a copy of the module. Apparently lectures were delivered from around 11 am to about 2.30 or 3 pm. Asked if there were any arrangements for overnight stay, one male teacher said that there were no facilities. Another teacher said: 'Women cannot stay overnight with men, even Sita had to go through an agni pariksha (trial by fire) when she stayed in another man's palace. The government has to be sensitive to the problems of women teachers.'

Modules are prepared at the state level without trying to find out what teachers need. A uniform module was being used across the state – across single-teacher, two-teacher and multi-teacher schools, for regular schools and for alternative schools. When asked what they thought of the training programme, the teachers said, 'It is a formality that we have to go through. Its okay, some lectures are interesting but the truth is that we do not gain anything significant.'

Our next stop was a district which was reported to have a dynamic woman District Collector. The training was being held in a large school. There were six or seven batches of 30 to 40 teachers. Lectures were in progress, modules were available, there were blackboards, lunch and tea was served, and residential facilities were provided to all the male teachers. The women teachers were put up in a dharmshala nearby – the DC said

that there was still a problem with asking women to stay overnight in the district headquarters. Lectures were the dominant mode and the workshop which started around 10 am was expected to conclude by 4 pm. In a review meeting held by the senior government official accompanying us, the focus was on the number of teachers attending, number of lectures, number of resource persons and budget provisions for accommodation and food. There was a spirited debate on whether Rs. 70 per teacher per day (the allocation available in SSA) was adequate. We did not hear anything about the content of the training programme.

The third stop was in a block headquarter. As we reached the training venue we saw a handful of teachers sitting on a mat. They had been informed that a senior official was coming, but they had not been able to inform all the 150 teachers as they got the information quite late. There were no papers, no modules, no blackboards and no food. The District Magistrate of this district was not particularly interested in the programme and had many law and order issues to deal with. District officials admitted that the training programme was a sham and they assured the official that they would certainly ensure that this was not repeated.

None of these are unusual situations—in-service training of teachers is by now a well-orchestrated enterprise. This is known as the 'cascade model': a few people come together at the state level (some from SCERT; others could be senior or talented teachers) and work with the SSA directorate to prepare the training module. They in turn train 'master-trainers' at the district level—again, some may be part of DIET and others may be resource teachers. These master-trainers then train the teachers.

In a recent study done in AP and Rajasthan, Dewan notes:

Crucial issues regarding the duration, content and process of training are decided by an arbitrary process. Speediness, rather than quality is the criterion for deciding who will train, the argument being that unhurried training did not guarantee quality. Moreover, the process was highly centralized—field-level personnel had no input into the pace of the training. Our discussions showed that while they were not sure of the areas that should be chosen for interaction or the content of training sessions, they were convinced that the current modules were not appropriate. One could sense the constant conflict between cynicism and resignation towards status quo and the hope that the structure would allow honest choice, review and reflection (H K Dewan (Hardy) in Rashmi Sharma, V Ramachandran, forthcoming 2008).

Is Kerala different?

Kerala is known to be a state with a difference, so we were eager to see whether the SSA teacher training was different here. Our first stop was an Institute of Advanced Studies in Education (IASE) where a summer programme was underway for teachers from government as well as government-aided schools in the district. Close to 150 teachers were present and lectures were under way. The objective of the 2008 summer training was to familiarise teachers with the National Curriculum Framework (2005). We asked if we could meet with some of them during the lunch break.

Reflecting on the last ten years, the teachers spoke of the changes that had come about in the government's approach. They described, for instance, a gradual shift from rote ('by heart' method) learning to a more participatory, Activity Based (AB) method where the distance between teachers and children is less. They commented that children are now more active, confident and more aware; they ask many

questions and this demands greater preparation from the teacher. Many activities go beyond the physical boundaries of the class, as for example, in the case of EVS teaching. Children also refer increasingly to materials other than the textbook, which is seen as just one possible source of information. They also consult their parents who sometimes feel that they are not learning much as a result!

For teachers, these changes imply that they are expected to have more 'outside knowledge' (meaning they are expected to know more than what is contained in the textbook) and must be prepared to answer any questions that will come their way. Listening to the conversation one teacher said softly, 'There is no leisure for us, only pressure!' The teachers burst out laughing as the teacher explained further: 'These changes are good, but are not effective – as yet. Children are still not learning well; their handwriting is not good now; their language has 'deteriorated'; and their spellings are bad. We are not giving importance to vocabulary and grammar.'

Discussions with smaller groups of teachers and teacher educators revealed that the winds of change started blowing during the DPEP days. Participatory training was introduced and teachers were actively engaged in exploring alternative ways of organising the classroom and interacting with children. But this momentum could not be sustained. With the coming of SSA, they said, things have deteriorated. Training programmes are now designed at a higher level. In the training we observed, for example, that the focus was on NCF 2005. The document was divided among a number of teachers who read and discussed it in the training programme. There were a lot of big words and big ideas – and the teachers who read and explained them did so mechanically. An effort was made to enable many teachers to act as resource persons so that the honorarium available for lectures was divided among a larger pool of teachers.

The message that came out loud and clear was that the energy seen between 1995-96 and 2001 is not visible now and that the state has actually moved backwards. The resource persons (teachers) are 'not resourceful' and the didactic mode of training is back. It is somewhat strange that district and state level administrators feel that there is a shortage of trainers and, therefore, practicing teachers double up as trainers and temporary resource persons. Apparently teachers do not accept them as they did in the past. There is obviously a deeper current, which may be related to the waning of a people's science movement or the growing trend to opt for English medium schools leading to the rapid expansion of private schools.

KSSP has always had a positive relationship with teachers and feels that teachers have always been central to the reform agenda in Kerala. However, KSSP is on the wane in the state at this moment. They (KSSP) did useful work between 1962 and the 1990s. Teachers, who once formed the backbone of KSSP, are not joining it as in the past. Their membership has come down quite a bit over the years. Politically too, the KSSP ideology is not welcomed by the left or the right. The left party itself has changed much over the years and today, they are very much open to private investments, which were anathema in the 1970s and 1980s (interview with late Professor Gopinathan Nair, CDS Trivandrum, May 2008)

Box 5.1: The role of KSSP in Kerala's Educational Experience

KSSP began in 1962 as an organisation for the popularisation of science led by teachers. In 1980-81 KSSP undertook an assessment (with GoI funding) of basic skills (3 Rs) which revealed that the 'literacy status among even Class 5 children was alarming. Many of them could not read!' This was an eye-opener for KSSP and the government

and it was this realisation that led to KSSP devising programmes and materials for basic literacy and science learning.

Following the 1981 study, KSSP undertook several experiments. A 45-day literacy programme for children called 'Akshara Vedhi' was started with support from parents and teachers. The organisation also started school science clubs, first outside and then inside schools and science fairs and quiz programmes. Its periodicals 'Eureka' and 'Sastra Keralam' were popular among teachers. A large number of teachers were involved in this because veteran scientists and teachers lectured to teachers in the 1970s when 1,500 school science clubs were started.

In the 1970s and 1980s teachers were the main cadres of KSSP. 'We were able to support the teachers in teaching-learning and relate this with outside society. Teachers realised that when this happens, teaching can become more interesting. This, combined with a 'hands-on' approach with lots of experiments, got other teachers as well as parents attracted to KSSP's work. We tried to operationalise the concept of the School Complex (as suggested by the 1966 Education Commission), we built resource groups and centres at various levels within the system. Over time, KSSP experimented with textbooks by changing the sequence of the content and exploring linkages between different subjects (math and language, science and math), drawing examples from society and nature. Many resource persons emerged from this process. We were able to do a lot with ordinary textbooks' (interview with M P Parameshwaran).

In the 1990s KSSP developed alternative textbooks for Classes 1-4—this was done by a group of around 150 teachers. This was also the time when DPEP was launched in the state. 'We were apprehensive about the World Bank, but we also saw this as a big opportunity to do something. The decisive moment for KSSP came when it was decided that the state would go for curriculum and textbook renewal. SCERT was incapable of doing this exercise and the DPEP State Programme Director and external experts from Ed. CIL reached out to KSSP teachers and resource persons. The LDF (Left Democratic Front) allowed us to work with the system and even "subvert the system". Whenever the textbooks were changed, this was followed by state-wide teacher-training. Again KSSP resource teachers played a big role in these training programmes.'

The key to understanding Kerala is that the change started from below, beyond school hours, on weekends and on holidays. What is interesting is that even the private school teachers' association (which is affiliated to the Congress party) worked with KSSP during the 1980s and 1990s. Change cannot come about by writing a few policy documents—it is people on the ground and in key positions and organisations/institutions with vision who can make a difference on the ground.

(Source: Interviews with M P Parameshwaran and Trissur, A. A. Bose (teacher), K.K. Krishna Kumar, C. P. Narayanan (Member State Planning Board) and Krishnan Master (a teacher and mathematician in Thiruvananthapuram) between 17 and 20 May 2008).

Turning the system upside down in Tamil Nadu

In Tamil Nadu, teachers retraced with us the journey from the 'joyful' learning package of the DPEP days to the ABL package of today. The overall environment in teacher-training programmes seems a distant cry from what we saw just a few years ago:

- 1988-89: P-MOST—Programme for Massive Orientation of School Teachers based on the NCERT module.
- 1993-94: SOPT—Special Orientation Programme for Teachers, also based on the NCERT module.

- 1994-95: Genesis of the 'joyful learning' package with support from the Tamil Nadu Science Forum. UNICEF financed this programme.
- 2001-03: DIET strengthening programme to enable these institutions to train and orient teacher educators and build their capacity.
- 2003: ABL programme initiated in 13 schools in Chennai Corporation and then expanded to 264 schools in 2004.
- 2007: ABL expanded to all the districts of Tamil Nadu.

Box 5.2: TN DIET strengthening programme (2001-03)

The initiative focused on preparing a core cadre of resource persons who, imbued with a new confidence and understanding, would work with other DIET faculty and teachers. The overall aim was to strengthen DIET faculty and DIET as an institution. In creating this core group, some key aspects were carefully built into the programme:

- 'Human resource development' type inputs were not provided separately, as merely including a few sessions on aspects such as leadership and, self-motivation would make little or no difference to the participants. Instead, these elements were integrated within other content sessions and the overall methodology of the workshops. Thus the participants were made to work together, were put in situations where they had to take the lead/initiate etc. Activities and exercises were designed to get the participants to think, examine (...) By setting an example, the resource persons attempted to convey strong messages about self-discipline, punctuality and so on.
- In order to break deeply entrenched hierarchies in the education system, the core group consisted of persons selected from all levels of the educational system—The Directorate of Teacher Education Research and Training (DTERT), DIET, BRC, CRC and teachers.

The programme did not focus only on hard core (conceptual, pedagogical thinking) skills; participants were encouraged to express themselves through singing, role-play, drawing etc. There was an attempt to 'open out' many aspects/issues that affected the participants to examine and understand them.

Those who took part in the programme emphasise that this process was different from anything that had ever happened earlier in the name of training. Earlier, training was usually held 'within the 4 walls of the room... between 10 am and 5 pm'. It was all instruction based—'do this, don't do this, follow this', etc. There was little space for participation as the traffic was 'one way, directed at the participants'. The Self Learning Programme, it is observed, changed attitudes by asking fundamental questions: 'What is education? Who is the teacher? What is *my* role?' In many ways, it was a revelation for the participants.

The refrain, however, is that the programme was short-lived and could not be built upon or sustained. As long as there were sympathetic officials in key positions, they pushed the programme. Once they moved on, the initiative came to a standstill. It was not assimilated within the system. In the history of efforts to strengthen teacher preparation institutions (and hence teachers), the TN DIET initiative may be recorded as a programme that had the potential to bring about qualitative changes throughout the system, beginning with DIETs, but which could not be sustained long enough to make a difference.

On the heels of the DIET strengthening initiative came the ABL programme, which drove home a few important lessons on how teachers learn. A senior administrator who was the motivating force behind ABL said that teachers have to realise that they are not just the agents of change, but that through their practice, they are the change. For example, when the state government was contemplating expanding ABL, 200 women teachers from Chennai volunteered to start the programme in districts and blocks to create model ABL schools. Simultaneously, a government order was issued

prohibiting schools from conducting examinations and inspectors from asking for examination results (M P Vijay Kumar, interviewed on 26 May 2008).

As soon as I joined as a teacher in 1994, I underwent 20 days of training in joyful learning. It was exciting but did not relate to our classroom. There was a lot of singing, dancing and storytelling, but there was no learning. I found it difficult to use these approaches all the time. I felt that this approach did not help me reach all the children. Also, I found it difficult to tell stories to children in Class 1...

Later I was asked to teach Grade 3 in the Corporation Primary School in North Chennai. In the first few days it became clear to me that children in my class had difficulties in writing and reading. I did a quick test and found that over 70 per cent of my students did not even know the alphabets and they were already in Class 3!

Training is so distant from our actual classroom needs (...) that is why the foundation is not there. I used to submit lesson plans every week (because I was required to do so) but it was not related to the actual classroom situation or what I actually did in class.

Things changed in 2004 after the ABL programme was introduced. For me training now means doing things on my own and with other teachers and learning from those experiences.

(Source: Interview with a teacher in Chennai, December 2007).

As this booklet was being drafted, newspapers reported that teachers in Tamil Nadu were protesting and had even called for a strike. Teachers who were involved in the Chennai city programme point out that the scaling up was done a bit too quickly. Apparently, one of the reasons for the protest was that the TL materials prepared for Classes 3 and 4 were not adequately tested. A teacher leader who is unhappy with the ABL programme asked: 'How can they expect teachers to be seated on the floor all the time? Older teachers and those who have health problems cannot do this...what is wrong in having a table and chair where the teacher can sit?' This may sound trivial, but has become a common refrain in the state. Many teachers and administrators, who for years have been used to a teacher-centred approach, find it difficult to change their ways and work their world around children.

Many commentators argue that there is nothing fundamentally different about ABL. The changes are cosmetic. All that has been done is that the textual content has now been transferred onto cards, which are prepared centrally by the education department. This by itself cannot make the difference. The real difference will take place when teachers engage in an approach that is flexible and suits the pace and ability of the learner. Merely dividing the children into groups and giving them cards does not result in peer learning. We heard that, barring a few schools, the old mindset of the teachers has not changed. We came away convinced that this issue needs to be addressed seriously and this is essential to ensure that ABL takes root and is not discontinued due to change in leadership, just as the Nali Kali programme was discontinued in Karnataka.¹⁰

Whereas the state government in Tamil Nadu has clearly engaged with the issue of teacher-training and experimented with different models and strategies for

¹⁰ The 'Nali Kali' programme in Karnataka was another attempt during the mid- to late- 1990s at adapting the Rishi Valley approach in government schools in Mysore district. The programme started as a pilot in one entire block (HD Kote) of the district but was discontinued when there was change in leadership of the programme.

improving it, our discussions in **West Bengal** revealed exactly the opposite: the state has made little progress towards developing a comprehensive teacher-training strategy. The state did not accept DIET in the late 1990s because of a fear of 'permanent staff liability' and it was as recently as 2002 that the DIET scheme was formally accepted. Funds for training earlier came through DPEP and now they come from SSA. The SSA directorate conducts training in consultation with WBBPE. Apparently a pedagogy committee selects the Key Resource Persons. The SCERT prepared the plan, but has no role in the execution. Responsibility for training of teachers is spread over different state and district level offices. As in many other states, in discussions and interviews we heard almost nothing about content and process of training.

The Third Joint Review Mission of SSA in West Bengal (January 2006) noted:

Training of teachers is a major component for improving quality and an outlay of Rs 58.07 crore has been approved against which only Rs 1.80 crore has been spent till 31/12/2005. Proposals for teacher training provide for three categories of training—10 days, 20 days and 60 days respectively called as in-service, induction and training of untrained teachers. No annual plan/programme for teachers training have been prepared. The state has not operationalised the latter two categories of training even though induction of para-teachers is very much required and even though there are more than 45558 untrained teachers at primary and 18235 teachers at the upper primary level. SPO is unable to take any view in this matter, as primary and secondary boards are the authorised bodies in this regard. The progress regarding In-service teacher training is equally unsatisfactory. So far, training of primary school teachers has been provided on two modules (English and Health) and no training programmes have been conducted for upper primary teachers (excepting a brief training on Life Style Education) as relevant training modules have not been finalised by the Secondary board. Overall, planning and management of teacher training activities in the state urgently needs to be fixed....

The situation on the ground has hardly changed in the last two years and teachers and administrators continue to feel disheartened and disillusioned. Teachers everywhere complain about high pupil-teacher ratios and say that they have a hard time managing the children. The apex teacher development institution, SCERT, had one Director and six Fellows—understaffed and inexperienced. DIETs too were understaffed and by and large there was really no one in the entire educational bureaucracy or in the academic institutions who had much to say about the skills and capacities of teachers.

Summing up

I have been a math teacher and now am involved in textbook development. What worries me is that there is a trend to make mathematics more formal rather than intuitive and child friendly (...) this was the reason why the confidence of the teachers is undermined. Teachers are even afraid to use their own language.

I have been in situations where the teacher-training ends up undermining the confidence of the teacher—when the training does not start by finding out what the teacher knows and what problems he/she faces in school. When this happens the teachers retreat into the textbook...

(Interview with Krishnan Master, Kerala, May 2008)

The above narrative reveals that despite innovations in some states, the problems and issues with teacher-training have not changed substantially over the years. Logistical and management aspects take precedence over content and process issues which is why despite high budget allocations in many states, what teachers actually gain from these training sessions is highly questionable. This situation has been

written about for over 20 years and the predominant training regime has received widespread attention and criticism.

- In all states, in-service training continues to utilise the ‘cascade model’, despite attendant transmission loss at each successive level of training;
- Training packages continue to be designed at upper levels of the educational hierarchy by functionaries with little or no personal experience of teaching at the elementary level; while DIETs and other in-service training institutions serve merely as implementing agencies;
- Training programmes are poorly designed, implemented in an ad hoc manner and bear no relation to teachers’ real needs with respect to content or instructional strategies;
- No follow-up is conducted to evaluate the effectiveness or relevance of training content to teachers’ practice; and
- The pedagogical underpinnings of these training programmes tend to be highly superficial and poorly understood even by the trainers themselves.

(Alexander 2008; Dhankar 2002 ; Dyer 1996; Dyer and Choksi 2004; Sarangapani and Vasavi 2003)

The implications of the foregoing for the promotion of meaningful learning experiences for teachers, not to mention children in the classroom, are obvious. To cite one example:

Clarke (2000) found that although DPEP teachers had learnt the new jargon (‘activity-based’, ‘child-centred’, joyful learning’, etc.) there was no appreciable difference in the understanding or practice of DPEP and non-DPEP teachers. Both methods were reported to be derived from pre-existing pedagogical practices and had no evidence of special child-centred focus. Several educationists have pointed to the inadequacy of the notion of ‘quality’ that has informed the DPEP arguing that it relies too heavily on only a intuitive notion of the understanding of the child as the starting point, for curriculum reform (Dhankar 2002). (...) Many teachers and observers have indicated and as we have observed in several schools, ‘joyful learning’ and teaching have become synonymous with making children sing and dance in class (Sarangapani and Vasavi 2003).

The issue of relevance is an inevitable by-product of how training programmes are designed in India: by high level functionaries with little knowledge or experience of teaching conditions in primary schools; based on an idealised vision of what teachers ‘should’ do, but with scant attention to practical details of hurdles in implementation; with limited input from teachers themselves and no space within the training for questioning or analysis of content. To take an example from Gujarat:

Teachers felt that their trainers were not sufficiently aware of the realities of small schools with single rooms and no facilities, and hence did not offer strategies for working in such conditions. (...) The pedagogical problems of the teachers in Gujarat’s rural schools are not primarily related to infrastructure, but to the absence of skills to cope with either teaching several classes simultaneously, or the needs of first generation learners, compounded by heavy and often irrelevant curriculum. The type of pre-service training they receive does not equip them with adequate classroom management strategies, or the confidence to adapt the curriculum, and is an important factor in low teacher motivation (Dyer 1996).

Evaluations and reviews have often recommended that the government should do things differently – a recent one summarises the suggestions that have been made from within the system and by donor agencies that are financing the SSA programme.

Box 5.3: Aide Memoire: Fifth Joint Review Mission of SSA (July 2007)

Given the SSA goal of significantly improving the quality of learning in the classroom, the Mission acknowledges that the SSA has set itself along the following directions:

- ⇒ Every State needs to develop a long-term training agenda, which gives a vision and specific directions to annual training programmes.
- ⇒ Adopt a cafeteria approach where teachers opt for the training they need rather than attend all training programmes.
- ⇒ About 3/4 of all primary schools have three or less teachers, and about one-third of all primary schools have less than 60 students spread over 4-5 classes.
- ⇒ Training programmes should provide comprehensive guidelines for teachers on how to maximise learning in multi-Std classrooms.
- ⇒ Students come from a variety of backgrounds, predominantly socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Based on local conditions, issues such as children's home language and cultural background, and discrimination of girls, SCs and STs need to be addressed during training.
- ⇒ Aspects of teacher competence at the upper primary level in subjects such as English, Mathematics and Science. Teachers should be provided intensive in-service training to help them acquire these subject matter skills and knowledge.
- ⇒ A universal concern of all involved in education is how to improve teacher performance in the classrooms. This is of particular concern to SSA, as its main goal is improving children's learning. Furthermore it has allocated considerable funds towards building of academic structures like BRCs and CRCs to provide academic support and guidance to teachers. In-service training of teachers on a regular basis, and teacher grants, has also become an institutionalised feature of SSA.

Some Conclusions

Whose need is it anyway?

Teachers need support, academic inputs as well as help to manage their classrooms. Teachers in West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have to manage huge groups. There are schools where one teacher has to manage 100 children! Close to 40 per cent of the primary schools in Rajasthan are managed by a single teacher and 32 per cent of these schools have less than 50 children across all classes. Single- and two-teacher schools are by definition multi-grade. Their training and management skill development needs are different from large five-teacher primary schools. In the tribal areas of Maharashtra and West Bengal, the children do not understand the state language as they speak a different one at home. Both states are home to thousands of new migrants who throng the urban areas in search of work – again the children of migrant families barely understand the state language. Teachers in schools that have children from different linguistic backgrounds need specialised skills.

Thousands of contract teachers are appointed every year: people like Ramesar and Jhumur. Para-teachers and contract teachers are more likely to work in relatively poor areas and with a larger proportion of first-generation school goers. They are also more likely to have children who speak a different language at home. And

schools managed by contract teachers are likely to be less endowed in terms of infrastructure and basic amenities.

All these teachers – regular teachers, those in single-teacher schools, those managing more than 60 children in one classroom, those who grapple with multiple languages in the community and those who have to face the reality of seasonal migration and long absenteeism – need someone they can reach out to, above all for continuous and dependable academic support. Yet the fact remains that the training plan emanates from above. It remains uniform and undifferentiated whether it originated in the DPEP days of district planning or during the SSA era of bottom-up and need-based planning.

Notwithstanding the rhetoric of policy and programme documents, of review mission reports and the curriculum framework it is clear that the ‘needs’ that are driving the training regime are definitely not the needs of the teacher. The process on the ground may be more inclusive in Tamil Nadu and Kerala as compared to other states, but even in these states the teachers are not involved in identifying their training needs. This ‘top down’ process draws its mandate from something quite different – annual plans and budget and turf wars. One administrator in Maharashtra said that it is the state government that has to meet its training target to access SSA funds. **So, is it their need that is driving the training regime rather than the needs of the teachers?**

Who is a good trainer?

Another important conclusion relates to the quality of those responsible for imparting training. Successive assessments of the DIET programme point out that DIET was conceived as the primary mechanism for bringing teacher-training and support activities closer to the schools. In practice, administrative rather than educational logic was utilised to specify staffing patterns for these new institutions, with advanced academic qualifications taking precedence over teaching experience at the elementary level. Dyer (2004) argues that:

There is a need for comprehensive professional training for DIET staff to help them be effective by developing the skills, knowledge and understandings appropriate for primary teacher educators. Thus, there is a need to reconsider the recruitment rules that demand double Masters degrees for DIET posts, and therefore exclude most primary teachers from becoming formal teacher educators, as primary teachers are rarely university graduates.

Rashmi Sharma reinforces this argument:

Nowhere was the low regard for professionalism more apparent than in the fact that in both the states (AP and Rajasthan), little attempt was made to staff the SCERTs and the DIETs on the basis of professional logic. The DIETS and SCERTs (organizations which make curriculum and textbooks and are expected to be academic leaders), did not have personnel with experience or expertise in elementary education. Instead, officials and high school teachers of appropriate seniority, rather than suitable skills, were posted in DIETs and SCERT/SIERT (in Sharma and Ramachandran, forthcoming).

A never ending story

In normal DPEP or SSA training, the pattern is predictable. A module is prepared and the cascade mode is unleashed. In DPEP the state directorate was in the driving seat with some help from Ed. CIL and resource persons (SCERT and DIETs were not always involved). In SSA too the administrator who heads the project in the state calls the shots – SCERT, DIET and all other bodies take orders from the

administrative head. At the end of the exercise the number of teachers trained is compiled and the expenditure statement prepared.

Even when promising new approaches are introduced (like Nali Kali or ABL, ILIP or Teacher Empowerment), the initial promise soon dissipates as the programme follows a predictable trajectory:

- ⇒ Someone at the national or state level becomes convinced of a new approach that could change the school from being dysfunctional to a vibrant learning institution. Sometimes the idea is shared by a larger group of peer leaders who jointly own the idea.
- ⇒ This idea is then tried out on a modest scale. A lot of effort goes into nurturing the pilot—national, state, district and school level people work together as a team. Practitioners outside the system are invited to participate (sometimes even partner). Organisations like RIVER of Madanapalle, Homi Bhabha Centre, Sandhan or Bodh join in and work with people in government.
- ⇒ Papers are written and presentations made, and if the ‘innovation’ is deemed exciting, best practice case studies are commissioned. The new approach is hailed as a ‘good practice’. Some teachers bask under the nurturing umbrella of the new approach—they start engaging with conceptual and philosophical issues.
- ⇒ Then the leader decides to scale up—moving from one or two blocks in a district to cover the entire state, from a few hundred schools to thousands of schools. This is where the first slip occurs. The painstaking process involved in nurturing the pilot is soon forgotten and the ‘innovation’ is cast in stone as a template. Teacher-training is rolled out—in the cascade mode—not significantly different from the run of the mill training that we are so familiar with, even though there may be differences in methodology and the material produced; the programme may even be participatory. The roll-out is carefully monitored—the leader and his or her trusted lieutenants criss-cross the state, talk to teachers, visit schools, meet parents and so on. A great deal of energy is unleashed.
- ⇒ As a year or may be even two years roll by, cracks begin to appear—the scaled-up model is a far cry from the pilot. The language and vocabulary sound familiar, but deep down it is not the same. What is lost is teachers’ ownership of the process. People speak in hushed tones—‘the process was short-circuited, teachers were not taken into confidence, the education establishment is hitting back’.
- ⇒ The leader who initiated the new approach is transferred or retires. A new person arrives, and starts off asking questions, and ultimately follows the bureaucratic dharma: ‘undo what my predecessor did!’
- ⇒ Ongoing projects are not rejected outright; they are allowed to fade away. Something new appears on the horizon: a new visionary with a new idea?

Rajasthan has seen any number of ‘innovations’ in education and in women and rural development. The development landscape of the state is strewn with examples of innovations that once showed a lot of promise but quickly faded away. With each successive wave in education, especially from 1987 to the present, teachers got more cynical. In a group discussion with teachers of Tonk and Jaipur districts (February 2008) it was apparent that they cherish the memories, they remember some training programmes that changed the way they look at learning—yet today they are back into the same fold, the same predictable routine.

Table 5.1: Some government initiatives that addressed teacher development

1987	Shiksha Karmi Rajasthan
1990	Minimum Levels of Learning and associated teacher-training
1992	Rajasthan Lok Jumbish
1994	Joyful learning – under DPEP (in may states concurrently)
1994	Nali Kali, Karnataka
1998	Active Schools Latur, Maharashtra
2002	Communitisation of elementary education, Nagaland
2002	Integrated Learning Improvement Programme, West Bengal
2003	Quality Improvement Programme, Andhra Pradesh
2003	Activity Based Learning, Tamil Nadu
2005	Children’s Language Improvement Programme, Andhra Pradesh
2007	Activity Learning Method for upper primary, Tamil Nadu

Why are we in this mess?

What is a school? Were we to pose this question to teachers today, they would probably start by listing building, boundary wall, mid-day meal and finally children. Yes, the environment is important but ultimately, a school is a web of relationships between a group of teachers and children. And it is this fact that gets lost in teacher-training programmes.

Some studies have shown that teachers’ training and experience have little bearing on students’ acquisition of cognitive skills (for example, Kingdon 1996), apparently arguing in favour of policy interventions oriented towards factors that do demonstrate such impact, such as school management and length of the school year. However, the question of training does not admit of a simple yes/no or more/less answer. It seems self-evident that poor quality and irrelevant training programmes will have little impact on teacher effectiveness or student learning, however defined. The fundamental question is not *whether* teachers should be trained; rather it is *what* training should consist of and *how* and *by whom* should it be imparted in order to fulfil the very real needs of teachers for training and support.

Policies and projects, national and state interventions notwithstanding, the root of the problem can thus be traced to two assumptions: **one**, that children are homogeneous and learn at the same pace and in the same way; and **two**, that teachers are homogeneous and need the same inputs regardless of who and where they are. The data clearly reveal that neither assumption is valid. Diversity in the classroom has increased: children of different ages, different social backgrounds and speaking different languages study together. Equally, diversity among teachers has increased: they have different educational levels, service conditions, places of residence, social and community backgrounds and of course gender. But we do not have a teacher development programme that takes this diversity as the point of departure.

We need teachers with courage as well as with experience. We cannot expect all new entrants to be free from social, gender and regional prejudices – after all teachers are a part of our society and they reflect its texture as much as anybody else. Yet there is no systematic process to address prejudices or deeply entrenched attitudes and belief systems.

Training programmes today privilege management-friendly concepts for education over education-friendly concepts of management. Little surprise then that teachers become cynical and resign themselves to business as usual.

VI Is there a way out?

Our objective in writing this booklet was to explore the ways in which teachers' practice is shaped by conditions on the ground. The underlying issue, of course, relates to why, despite enormous increases in budget outlays and a host of government initiatives, learning outcomes in our primary schools continue to be so poor.

We begin this final chapter by presenting five key conclusions that emerged from this exploration, drawing both from our own fieldwork and from available literature on the subject. We then provide a brief overview of what a comprehensive approach to teacher development should encompass, again drawing from available literature on the subject. And finally, we discuss some possible ways forward.

Five key conclusions

We began this booklet by summarising three possible ways of viewing the 'teacher problem'. Simply put, these consist of: blame the teachers, who are irresponsible and lazy. Blame the larger political and administrative environment which forces teachers to prioritise non-academic tasks over teaching. Or blame the education sub-systems that select, train and support teachers for not providing them with either opportunity or incentive to engage with what it means to teach well.

As the foregoing chapters of this booklet have demonstrated the diagnosis is far from simple. But we believe that while there will always be some lazy teachers and potential avenues for corruption, the main responsibility for this massive failure lies with the education system itself. Here are the reasons why.

Conclusion 1. Teaching positions are in great demand all over the country. But despite the plentiful supply of teacher candidates, little effort goes into either selecting those who show talent for and interest in teaching, or adequately preparing those selected to engage with educational processes in any meaningful way.

We have seen earlier in this booklet that entry-level requirements are very low for primary school teachers. Typically a low pass percentage in the Class 12 or even Class 10 examination is all that is needed. Pre-service training programmes, where these are required for appointment to teaching positions, are typically designed on the assumption that this level of schooling provides an adequate content base for teaching in primary schools, although this assumption has been shown by many studies to be untrue, particularly at the upper primary level. If we want children to learn, then education policy makers must address this issue; it will not go away by itself. If large numbers of teachers themselves are unable to grasp primary school content, they obviously cannot teach it to others.

Nor, as we saw in Malati's experience, do pre-service training programmes provide the skills that future teachers need in order to address learners' needs in diverse contexts. These courses assume that teachers will have a homogenous community of learners, adequate infrastructure and TLM and the luxury of teaching a single class at a time. The real conditions that prevail in most government primary schools across the country are never addressed; thus teacher candidates spend a year or two receiving and being tested on a vast amount of theoretical knowledge that is of little

help in real classroom situations. Once again, educational policy needs to be based on ground realities rather than on wishful thinking.

Most important of all, teachers will tend to teach as they themselves were taught, unless they are provided with opportunities and incentives to analyse and question their own experience and thereby construct a different conception of what classroom processes should aim to achieve. At different points throughout this booklet we have described how teachers typically 'follow orders', 'cover the syllabus', 'fill out formats?', and so on, irrespective of children's learning outcomes. It is hard to think of a more damning indictment of the education system than this single fact: teachers do not even conceive of their work in terms of creating an environment where all children can learn.

Obviously, these issues have profound and far-reaching implications for the quality of teachers that we produce and for the learning outcomes that they are able to ensure. The explosion of private teacher-training institutions in many states complicates the situation even further, given that huge numbers of 'trained' teachers are being produced by institutions with limited interest in educational quality and over which state governments have little authority. Currently, the teacher-training certificate is a piece of paper which is required in many states for appointment to a teaching position, and has no more relevance than that.

Are there alternative models available? As described in Chapter III of this booklet, there certainly are. The Rajasthan Shiksha Karmi Project was based on an entirely different conception of what it means to be a teacher, and therefore on who could become a teacher and how teachers should be trained and supported. The B.El.Ed course offered by Delhi University, while starting out with a different set of assumptions and objectives, offers students an opportunity to grapple with real issues involved in teaching and learning rather than reproducing educational theory in examinations. If states and institutions have failed to take advantage of the rich learnings generated by these and other initiatives, it is because they fail to prioritise educational processes over administrative requirements.

Conclusion 2. Once teachers are appointed, not only does the education system fail to identify, much less reward, good teaching practice, it actively discourages it in a variety of ways.

Above and beyond what beginning teachers bring to the job, the education system acts in a number of ways to shape what teachers do in the classroom. These include the nature and amount of in-service training they are provided, the kind of supervision and support they receive and the incentives the system offers for dedicating more or less effort to teaching. In addition, the degree and nature of teachers' accountability – to their employers, to their students, or to parents – affects what they are willing to attempt, while their degree of autonomy impacts their ability to adapt content and methods to local needs. We briefly discuss these issues below.

In-service teacher-training

State education systems rarely if ever bother to ask teachers what kind of training would be useful to them. It seems quite difficult to comprehend that an in-service training programme on teaching in multi-grade classrooms or on the special needs of first-generation learners, to name only two possibilities, has (to the best of our

knowledge) yet to be designed. Despite the huge emphasis on in-service training in recent years under SSA, it comes as no surprise to find that teachers for the most part view these courses as formalities that have to be completed, rather than as important resources to help them do their job better. Nor is it a surprise to learn that student learning outcomes appear to be not much affected by whether the teacher is 'trained' or not.

A key component of the distance between intentions and practice with respect to teacher-training relates to the suitability of those responsible for designing and imparting this training. The valoration of advanced degrees over practical experience is an issue that comes up constantly not only with regard to teacher-training, but when we look at the primary education sub-sector as a whole. We will return to this issue a little later.

Academic supervision and support

If a teacher cannot turn to a supervisor or a BRC or CRC resource person for curricular support, to whom can she turn? Despite the fact that the BRCs and CRCs were set up with this precise objective in mind, in practice these personnel fulfil routine administrative functions. The primary school teacher has no source of academic support whatsoever. Given that training programmes provide little help in this regard, she is left to muddle through as best she can – obviously, at the expense of her students' learning.

Earlier in this booklet we described the role played by supervision and support staff within the education system. Supervisory staff are primarily responsible for monitoring routine administrative aspects of school functioning and for collecting data during inspection visits; indeed, they have neither the training nor the experience to provide academic supervision or support to teachers. On the contrary, examples abound of supervisors actively blocking teachers' attempts to utilise locally developed innovations to make curriculum or teaching methods more relevant to the needs of their students on the grounds that these go beyond the content or activities prescribed by textbooks.

In many states, initiatives on decentralised governance envisage an active role for local community institutions in school supervision. The question seems to be less *whether* communities can play such a role but how this role is constructed: *what areas* of school functioning they can monitor, *who* within communities is involved and *how* monitoring is to be done. This, in turn, requires that communities be aware of the role that they are expected to play in school functioning, as well as a careful demarcation of areas that require academic or pedagogical supervision and those that are within the ability of the community to monitor, such as teacher attendance.

Incentives

The formal or informal incentives provided by the educational system can be important influences on how much effort teachers dedicate to teaching activities. Incentives can be monetary (for example, salary increments related to student performance on standardised tests), or may take other forms (for example, options for professional development or career advancement related to some measure of teacher effectiveness). In India, because salaries are related exclusively to seniority and training, teachers have little to gain by putting more effort into teaching

(Kingdon 1996). Further, the automatic pass procedure in primary schools in many states means that there is no systematic way of evaluating student learning, let alone linking it to teachers' performance.

At the same time, a multiplicity of factors act as *disincentives* by actively discouraging teachers from developing or adopting creative teaching practices. Two of these have already been discussed above: training methodologies that discourage questioning, discussion and analysis by teachers, expecting them to apply training content exactly as they received it rather than adapting it to the needs of specific learners; and a supervisory system focused on collection of administrative data and on ensuring that schools and school personnel conform to standards and procedures developed elsewhere. An additional powerful disincentive is created by the informal system of patronage and rent-seeking in operation throughout the educational system, which obliges teachers, willingly or unwillingly, to dedicate time and effort to keep local politicians and elites happy, given that they control the limited rewards obtainable within the system – in particular, transfers to desired locations.

Accountability

To whom, then, are elementary school teachers accountable for the quality of learning outcomes? That is, who within the system has the authority and the ability to define what constitutes good teaching practice, evaluate whether teachers are doing a good job, reward those who are, and sanction those who are not? The short answer to this question is: nobody.

'Good teaching practice' is not evaluated in primary schools in India: conformity to rules and regulations entirely unrelated to student learning is.

Within the school, head teachers – where these exist – exert limited authority over teachers, since promotions, transfers and other decisions are taken elsewhere. Supervisory personnel are confined primarily to administrative inspections and, as we have seen, have been known to exert a negative influence on innovative teaching practice. Local communities do not have the skills to undertake this kind of professional evaluation of teachers. District education authorities often operate on the basis of political or administrative, rather than educational, criteria.

Autonomy

Teacher autonomy and accountability are in many ways two sides of the same coin. Whereas accountability looks at whom teachers answer to in terms of the quality of their professional performance, autonomy identifies the ways in which teachers themselves have the flexibility to adapt what they do in the classroom to the specific needs and context of their students. We have seen in the earlier chapters of this booklet that teachers are not expected to exercise their own judgement in determining how best to teach: since both content and instructional methods are defined elsewhere, attempts to deviate from these are actively discouraged. Teachers are expected to utilise innovations developed at higher levels of the system, regardless of practical constraints on their implementation.

The attempt to reduce the educational experience (today acknowledged, at least in theory, to be an interactive process, rather than the mechanical transmission of knowledge) to the availability of a 'least common denominator' series of predefined inputs, regardless of context, does not, however, guarantee a minimum level of

classroom learning. On the contrary, by assuming that the provision of standardised inputs automatically translates into meaningful classroom experiences, such policies further limit teachers' ability to construct their own and their students' knowledge.

Conclusion 3. Teachers are appointed, trained and evaluated on the basis of administrative rather than educational logic. Until this situation is changed, learning outcomes are unlikely to improve in our primary schools.

The pitfalls of basing educational policy on administrative logic should be clear from the discussion of the two conclusions presented above. If teachers do not view students' learning—however defined—as part of, let alone central to, their professional responsibilities, then clearly the situation cannot be remedied by tweaking quantitative targets or by establishing additional administrative layers.

It is imperative that policy makers realise that the field of education is not just another sector of the economy like transport or agriculture or public health. It is perhaps the *only* sector where outcomes depend at least as much on processes as on inputs. In other words, the best textbooks in the world will be of limited use in the hands of an incompetent teacher, whereas a talented and sensitive teacher always finds ways to catalyse students' learning even under the most difficult of working conditions.

But in order to promote competence and nurture talent among teachers, the education system needs to prioritise these aspects and operationalise them throughout the system. This means, for example, that teachers should be chosen on the basis of aptitude and interest, not only on the basis of marks. Promotions and salary increments should be awarded for effective teaching, not only on the basis of seniority. Supervision should encourage innovative practices, not punish them. And training programmes should aim to help teachers think for themselves about what they are doing, not merely to do as they are told. Most of all, these different areas of educational policy must be coordinated so that they all push teachers in the same direction, towards better teaching practices.

What this means, in short, is that educational criteria need to predominate over administrative logic. But this can only begin to happen if those providing leadership in educational departments and institutions are themselves educators rather than administrators. Unfortunately, the opposite is true in India today.

Conclusion 4. Educational planning must be holistic, rather than piecemeal; and based on ground reality, rather than wishful thinking.

Rashmi Sharma (forthcoming) argues: 'The fact is that any policy or plan that is oblivious to the existing reality is no more than a wish list (...) A redefinition of "policy" is clearly required in the Indian context. First of all, policy needs to address some core issues that confront government today...'. We have seen that policy announcements enjoy little leverage when the institutions responsible for policy implementation are themselves not in control, are dominated by narrow turf or profit motives, or run by bureaucrats with little understanding of educational processes.

The absence of an integrated vision for educational development can be seen concretely in the absence of linkages, both horizontal and vertical, between different

institutions within the education system. As this booklet has shown, educational activities in every state are developed piecemeal by a large number of sub-systems, each responding to a different set of criteria and objectives. SSA and SCERT in-service training programmes, for example, are typically designed and operated independently of each other; and neither one draws upon the experience of non-government organisations. While the DIETs fall under SCERTs, BRCs and CRCs are responsible to the state SSA project. Even where vertical linkages are clearly defined, typically only the apex body in each chain has any real authority. DIETs, for example, function as subsidiaries of SCERT in each state rather than as autonomous professional institutions.

The lack of linkages within the system can result in the generation of educational policy based on an idealised vision of the future which has little connection with ground realities. Because implementation is monitored on the basis of quantitative targets rather than educational outcomes, the numerous ways in which such policy fails to be translated into educationally worthwhile practice – and the reasons for this failure – are neither documented nor analysed.

Conclusion 5. Primary education must be recognised as a professional field in its own right, rather than as the ‘poor relation’ within the education system: one that is allowed to exist, but denied parity in terms of status, autonomy, or resources.

We mentioned earlier that the role of professional leadership within the educational system is critical to the development of policies that take a comprehensive, long-term view of teacher development. But only tortuous bureaucratic logic can result in a situation where primary school teaching experience is of little value *even within the primary education sub-sector*. Primary school education has yet to be seen as a separate and valid field of expertise: academic and administrative staff alike is selected for higher-level positions, even within the sector on the basis of the professional distance that they have travelled *away* from primary school teaching, rather than experience and demonstrated expertise within it.

Thus, for example, a B.Ed or M.Ed degree is often *required* for senior level posts in the primary education sector, even if (as is often the case) the holder of the degree has never set foot in a primary school since he graduated from one. Not only does this increase the likelihood that the wrong people will be in charge of the sector, in many states it also means that talented primary school teachers are unable to apply for leadership positions. Do these criteria make any sense? Is it not more important that those responsible for primary education should have firsthand knowledge of the issues and constraints that primary schools face on the ground?

What should a model for teacher development seek to provide?

Before discussing some possible ways forward, it is important to have some conceptual clarity regarding what an integrated model for teacher development should aim to include. We turn to available literature for some answers.

Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves (1992) identify four basic elements that provide a framework for understanding teacher development:

- the teacher's *purpose*;
- the teacher *as a person*;
- the *real world context* in which teachers work; and

- the *culture of teaching*, that is, teachers' professional relationships with others within the system.

Innate to this conceptualisation is the understanding that teachers' mastery of subject matter and pedagogical skills, though important, are not the only elements that contribute to effective teaching. This approach recognises, first, that teachers are human beings who 'do not come empty-handed, they bring much baggage in the form of images, ideas and experiences about teaching. One task (...) is to help them unpack and articulate these, so some can be thrown away, others refashioned or replaced' (Lewin and Stuart 2003)—a process that requires the provision of opportunities to engage in continuous, practice-based reflection on educational purposes and processes. It recognises, second, that teachers' practice depends not only on their own abilities or even desire to teach well, but in equal measure on the conditions, expectations and rules of engagement—both formal and informal, stated and unstated—of their working environment.

While the above discussion provides an overview of the kinds of issues that teacher development policies and programmes should address, the process of design of these policies is another important area to keep in mind. Two elements vital to the design process are highlighted below.

First, to what extent are teachers themselves involved in policy formulation? If teachers are mere recipients and implementing agents of curricula and textbooks produced elsewhere, these are unlikely to address their real needs. Nor does a top-down design process model the participatory, interactive process that teachers are subsequently expected to engage in within the classroom as a central aspect of a constructivist educational pedagogy. An influential review of teacher development practices in five countries concluded:

When teachers are actively involved and empowered in the reform of their own schools, curriculum, pedagogy, and classrooms, even those with minimal formal education and training are capable of dramatically changing their teaching behavior, the classroom environment, and improving student achievement. Conversely, when teachers are ignored, or when reforms come from above or are not connected to the daily realities of the classroom and local environment, even the most expensive and well designed interventions are almost certain to fail (Craig et al, 1998).

Second, to what extent do educational policies encompass a comprehensive and integrated response to the diverse set of factors known to affect teacher development?

The policy environment in which teachers work sends a myriad of often conflicting signals about how schools are expected to do business and about what behaviors and skills are valued and rewarded. Messages about more- or less-preferred teaching practices and learner outcomes issue from all of the major education policy domains, including those that shape curriculum, assessment, teacher and administrator licensing and evaluation, and accountability. Existing policies and practices must be assessed in terms of their compatibility with two cornerstones of the reform agenda: a learner-centered view of teaching and a career-long conception of teachers' learning (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin 1995).

We have seen in the preceding sections of this chapter—and indeed throughout this booklet—that in the Indian context, these 'conflicting signals' comprise a

fundamental disconnect between the theory and practice of teacher development: that is, the discourse on what teachers 'should' be and do on the one hand, and how the educational system acts to promote or discourage these attitudes and behaviours on the other.

To summarise, available literature suggests that approaches to effective teacher development are:

- *Multifaceted*, attending to a variety of aspects in the evolution of a teacher;
- *Continuous*, requiring the availability of different types of platforms and opportunities for growth throughout their careers;
- *Comprehensive*, requiring attention to these different aspects of teacher development in an integrated manner; and
- *Responsive* to teachers' needs and realities on the ground: supportive rather than prescriptive, flexible rather than rigid, and locally developed rather than prescribed from above.

To conclude this section we reproduce below a series of questions with which to evaluate current and potential policies related to teacher development (Box 6.1).

Box 6.1. Designing teacher development policies

Experience with successful professional development efforts suggests a number of design principles to guide national and state officials struggling to devise 'top-down support for bottom-up change' and to guide local actors who are rethinking their policies. Each proposed and existing policy can be 'interviewed' - that is, subjected to a number of questions - to determine how well it corresponds with key factors related to teachers' learning and change. For example:

- ⇒ Does the policy reduce the isolation of teachers, or does it perpetuate the experience of working alone?
- ⇒ Does the policy encourage teachers to assume the role of learner, or does it reward traditional 'teacher as expert' approaches to teacher/student relations?
- ⇒ Does the policy provide a rich, diverse menu of opportunities for teachers to learn, or does it focus primarily on episodic, narrow 'training' activities?
- ⇒ Does the policy link professional development opportunities to meaningful content and change efforts, or does it construct generic in-service occasions?
- ⇒ Does the policy establish an environment of professional trust and encourage problem solving, or does it exacerbate the risks involved in serious reflection and change and thus encourage problem hiding?
- ⇒ Does the policy provide opportunities for everyone involved with schools to understand new visions of teaching and learning, or does it focus only on teachers?
- ⇒ Does the policy make possible the restructuring of time, space and scale within schools, or does it expect new forms of teaching and learning to emerge within conventional structures?
- ⇒ Does the policy focus on learner-centred outcomes that give priority to learning how and why, or does it emphasise the memorisation of facts and the acquisition of rote skills?

(Source: Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin 1995)

Looking to the future

Is there a way out? Is there something that we can do to shake up the 'control raj' and breathe some life and fresh air into it? We talked to teachers and parents, researchers

and administrators, social activists and educators. Here are some ideas that emerged in the course of this exploration.

Pressure from below and change from within

One resounding message is that there is an urgent need to create platforms and mechanisms which enable teachers to interact as professionals, not only among themselves but also with other professionals such as scientists, scholars and college teachers. A churning of sorts is needed and teachers have to be at the heart of this churning. If sustained over a long enough period, these 'spaces' for constructive engagement with the reality of Indian schooling are likely to catalyse changes from within.

There is a need to gradually expand the pool of teachers who are thinkers, scientists, poets, mathematicians, artists, musicians, sports persons and so on. We need a critical mass of people who take pride in what they do. Some small steps have been taken in this direction, albeit tentatively. This is what KSSP did in the 1970s and 1980s, Kishore Bharati and Friends Rural Centre in the late 1970s and early 1980s and to some extent Eklavya and the HSTP programme attempted over many years. The Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education has introduced a fellowship programme that enables teachers to spend a few months at the Centre exploring their areas of interest in science education. The M V Foundation has created a forum for teachers (outside the government and outside the formal system) to come together and talk about children and education. There are other initiatives that have tried to bring together teachers as professionals to talk, share and discuss. Vikramshila (West Bengal) has been discussing the need for a teacher-led movement for quality improvement. The Pratichi Trust has tried to dialogue with teachers in groups and also with the teachers' union with the firm belief that change is possible if it is teacher-led.

Linked to this is the need for affirmation and support to exceptional teachers. There are thousands of teachers across the country who despite all odds continue to teach with great commitment. We heard about such teachers in every area that we visited – not just as a part of this specific endeavour, but over the last 10 or 15 years. A lot needs to be done to bring such role models to the forefront. For too long negative images have found their way not only into the media but also into power, influence and awards. The reality is that teachers as a group are in some measure politically empowered but both as a group and as individuals professionally disempowered. Addressing their professional identity, their need for knowledge and skills and their empowerment as a community is a logical starting point.

Possibly if we stop seeing all teachers as the problem and instead start seeing at least 'some' teachers as the solution, the process of change could begin. If the non-governmental sector, the academic community, the corporate sector and of course the government applied their minds and worked together, we could ensure lasting change.

This is within our reach and something that can be done in the age of electronic and print media. Teacher conventions could be followed up with a range of activities to enable teachers to explore their subject/discipline, access knowledge and skills and become engaged in something more than themselves as individuals with secure government jobs. We need teachers who feel good about themselves. We need teachers who go to work with excitement, energy and ideas.

Create hubs for a learning community of teachers and educators

Any mass movement—working with teachers is nothing short of a mass movement—needs anchors, platforms and spaces where the uninitiated can mingle with those who are part of the process. The great ideas of block and cluster level resource centres, teacher centres and the like got bureaucratised because the idea was operationalised in a bureaucratic manner. Can an open and vibrant hub be created by a large number of active and interested persons and institutions? Can we create opportunities for teachers to come together, use a library or a laboratory, access interesting teaching and learning material, meet other teachers and educators and attend a workshop of their choice?

Bring teacher education into the ambit of higher education

The quality of our teacher educators is a sad commentary on the state of higher education. Just introducing a few exciting courses like the B.El.Ed (Delhi University) cannot make up for thousands of poor quality institutions and courses. The lack of engagement of higher education with schools and schooling is a sad commentary on the way our educational system has grown.

India needs to create a pool of young people who look at education differently and who are willing to explore and experiment. A multi-pronged strategy needs to be developed. As a first step higher 'education' universities need to be created in partnership with those who realise the critical importance of *quality* education for the long-term development of the country. These should be people from a wide spectrum—non-government organisations that are working in education, corporate philanthropic bodies and private educational establishments. Such institutions should not be confined to urban areas; there are thousands of rural youth who may see in this a chance to escape from the downward spiral of poor quality education, poverty and powerlessness.

Advocate for autonomous academic standard setting

Given the long history of merging of roles of standard setters, regulators and administrators—NCTE being a classic example—there is a need for an autonomous academic standard setting regime, one that is outside the direct control of the educational administration and one that cannot metamorphose itself into a government department. There is a need to create a body that draws purely on eminent educationists and academics to lay down standards for teacher education (especially pre-service), monitor whether these are being adhered to and generate public pressure for compliance through periodic research-based reports on standards. Such a body could also develop standard benchmarks which need to be accessible to all.

Advocate for the professionalisation of elementary education

Some simple administrative changes could blow some fresh air into the system. In Tamil Nadu and Kerala, teachers who join at the primary level can upgrade their educational qualifications and move up the education system ladder; there is nothing that can prevent a teacher from becoming even the Director of SCERT in the state. At each stage, teachers can avail of leave to study and to take examinations. Not only are appointments at all levels—middle school, high school, DIET or even SCERT—open to all to apply, but teachers who have upgraded their educational qualifications are given encouragement through reservation of a specific percentage

of posts. Teachers we spoke to in these two states said that this was a huge motivator. Incidentally, we also met officials in SSA who had started their careers as primary school teachers.

When the Shiksha Karmi Project was initiated the idea was to enable rural youth to gradually upgrade their educational qualifications and thereby become 'regular' teachers at some point of time. Recently (2007) the Orissa government has proposed that those who enter as para-teachers/contract teachers should, over the years, move up to become regular teachers. Interestingly the World Bank is also proposing a similar regime, whereby a teacher could first be hired as an apprentice and then move up to become an associate teacher (based on performance and educational status) and finally a 'master', meaning a regular teacher. This approach also argues for checks and balances in the tasks of hiring, posting/assignment, training, salary, supervision and dismissal—thereby 'balance(ing) local control with higher-level support for training, professional standards and monitoring' (Pritchett and Pance 2006).

Do we have a chance?

For far too long educationists and researchers have only analysed and pointed out what is wrong and how terrible the system is. The time has come to develop clear plans—maybe state-specific plans—for educational reform. There is a need to bring together like-minded people and those with experience in both the education sector as well as in management to develop concrete alternatives, put them out into the public domain and talk to people who care. Momentous changes like the Right to Information or the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) programme did not happen because someone in government had a bright idea. They came about because a group of people decided to work towards them.

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Acronyms

AB: Activity Based
ABL: Activity Based Learning
AP: Andhra Pradesh
APF: Azim Premji Foundation
ASER: Annual Survey of Education Report
B. El. Ed.: Bachelor in Elementary Education programme
BEO: Block Education Officer
BRC: Block Resource Centre
CLIP: Children's Language Improvement Programme
CLRC: Cluster Level Resource Centre
CRC: Cluster Resource Centre
D.Ed: Diploma on Education
DC: District Collector
DIETs: District Institutes of Education and Training
DISE: District Information System on Education
DM: District Magistrate
DPEP: District Primary Education Programme
DPSC: District Primary School Council
DSE: Directorate of School Education
DTERT: Directorate of Teacher Education Research and Training
EVS: Environmental Studies
GO: Government Order
GoI: Government of India
HBCSE: Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education
HM: Headmaster
HSTP: Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme
IASE: Institutes for Advanced Study in Education
ICT: information and communications technology
ILIP: Integrated Learning Improvement Programme
KSSP: Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad
LGP: Learning Guarantee Programme
MHRD: Ministry of Human Resource Development
MP: Madhya Pradesh
MSCERT: Maharashtra Council for Educational Research and Training
MSK: Madhyamik Shiksha Karmasuchi
NAAC: National Assessment and Accreditation Council
NCERT: National Council of Educational Research and Training
NCF: National Curriculum Framework
NCTE: National Council for Teacher Education
NEP: National Education Policy
NFHS: National Family Health Survey
NIEPA: National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
NSSO: National Sample Survey Organisation
NUEPA: National University of Educational Planning and Administration
P-MOST: Programme for Massive Orientation of School Teachers
PRIs: Panchayati Raj Institutions
QIP: Quality Improvement Programme
RGSJP: Rajiv Gandhi Swarna Jayanti Patashala
RPM: Review-Planning-Monitoring
RV: Rishi Valley

SC: Schedule Caste
SCERT: State Council of Educational Research and Training
SI: School Inspector
SIERT: State Institute of Education Research and Training
SKP: Shiksha Karmi Project
SKs: Shiksha Karmis
SOPT: Special Orientation Programme for Teachers
SSA: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
SSK: Shisu Siksha Karmasuchi
SSP: Shishu Shiksha Prakalpa
ST: Scheduled Tribe
STC: Senior Teaching Certificate
TLM: Teaching-Learning Material
TTC: Teacher Training Certificate
UEE: Universal Elementary Education
UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
VEC: Village Education Committee
WBBPE: West Bengal Board of Primary Education

Persons interviewed

1. Amukta Mahapatra, Chennai
2. Anita Kaul, Joint Secretary, MHRD
3. CP Narayanan, Member, State Planning Board, Kerala
4. Director and faculty of MSCERT, Maharashtra
5. Director and faculty of SCERT of Kerala
6. Director and faculty of SCERT of Tamil Nadu
7. Director and faculty of SCERT, West Bengal
8. Director Rohit Dhankar, teachers and faculty members of Digantar, Jaipur
9. Dr. Ganesh Nigam, UNICEF, Jaipur
10. Dr. John and Zakia Kurrien, Centre for Learning Resources, Pune
11. Dr. Krishna Kumar, Director NCERT, New Delhi
12. Dr. Lalit Kishore Lohme, Jaipur
13. Dr. Raghavendra Chhatopadhyay, Kolkata
14. Dr. Sharda Jain and faculty members of Sandhan, Jaipur
15. Dr. Subir Shukla, New Delhi
16. Dr. Suman Karandikar, AAPANACH, Pune
17. Gautam Ghosh, Chairman District Primary School Council, Birbhum District, West Bengal
18. Krishnan Master, Mathematics teacher and resource person, Kerala
19. Kumar Rana, Pratichi Trust, Kolkata
20. Late Prof. P. R. Gopinathan Nair of CDS Thiruvananthapuram
21. M. P. Vijaykumar, Mr. Ratinavelu, Dr. Devarajan and Dr. Elangovan of Govt. of Tamil Nadu
22. M.P Parameswaran, K.K Krishna Kumar, A.A Bose and teachers from Thrissur working with KSSP
23. Narendra Nagpal and staff of CERP, Jaipur
24. Pallav Goswami, Retd. Official of Govt. of West Bengal
25. Principal and faculty members of DIET Thrissur, Kerala
26. Principal and faculty members of DIET, Pune, Maharashtra
27. Principal, faculty members and trainee teachers in Institute of Advanced Studies in Education, Thrissur, Kerala
28. Prof. Abhyankar, Quality Improvement Cell, Govt. of Maharashtra, Mumbai
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30. Prof. Leena Deshpande and Dr. Chitra Sohni, SNTD College, Pune
31. Prof. R. Govinda, NUEPA, New Delhi
32. Shobhita Rajagopal, IDS, Jaipur
33. Shri Uttam Rao Mane, Principal Junior College of Education, Satara, Maharashtra
34. Shubra Chatterji, Kanupriya Jhunjunwala and staff of Vikramshila, Kolkata
35. Sudarshan Das and S Roy, Govt. of West Bengal
36. Sukumar Roy, Dist. Birbhum, West Bengal