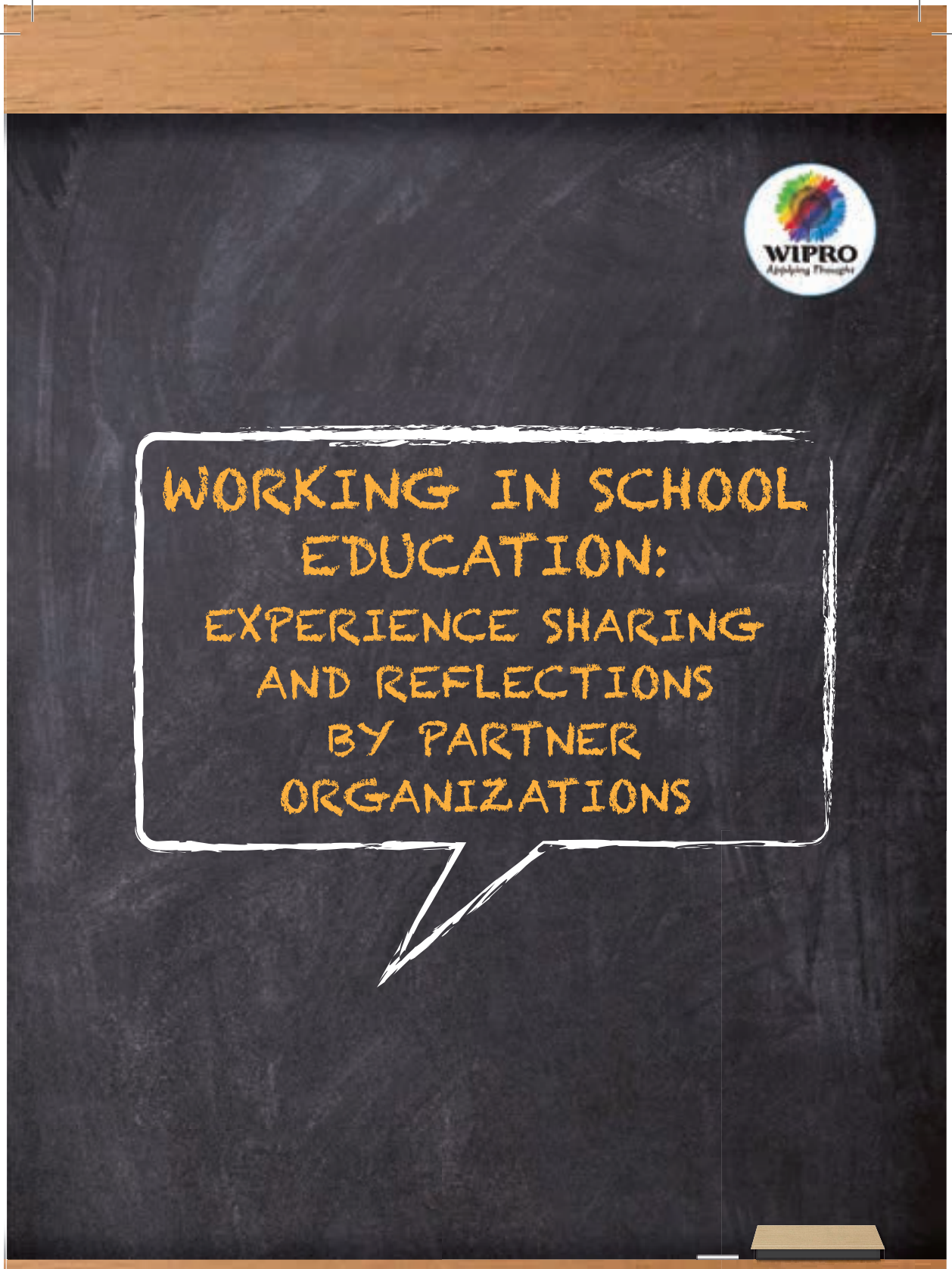

Wipro Applying Thought in Schools
Proceedings of 16th Wipro Partners' Forum

Working in School Education:

Experience Sharing and Reflections by Partner Organizations

Wipro Applying Thought In Schools
Proceedings of 16th Wipro Partners' Forum,
13th-15th April 2016, School of Ancient Wisdom, Bangalore.

Wipro Applying Thought in Schools

Wipro Applying Thought in Schools is Wipro's social initiative in education born out of Wipro's belief that a corporation's 'power to do good' must manifest in a thoughtful and deliberate set of initiatives to¬wards a social purpose. Education was chosen as the sphere of work as it can be a fundamental enabler of social change. Within education, our focus is specifically on school education.

Our work in school education is grounded in our vision of a just, equitable, sustainable and humane society. This vision is inspired by democratic ideals and India's constitutional values. Schools are spaces that can nurture these values in young people and develop their capabilities to become active participants in nurturing such a society. Good education enables the growth of individuals along the multiple dimensions of cognitive, social, emotional, physical, ethical and aesthetic development, so they are able to grow to their fullest potential. These ideas are not new or unique; in fact it derives from ideas of various educational thinkers, educationists as well as national documents such as the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005.

Bringing about this educational reform requires deliberate, long term and sustained work to build capacities of schools and the larger education system. Civil society organizations have an important role to play in this. Our strategy is to support civil society organizations engaged in school education to develop their capacities to work towards this education reform in a systemic manner. Over the past 15 years, we have supported over 50 organizations through over 100 educational projects and initiatives and built an active network of organizations working in school education in India.

The 16th Partner's Forum was on partners sharing insights on organizational development and their work.

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Preface

The 16th Wipro Partners' Forum, held in April 2016, was focused on sharing and discussing partner organizations' work. Many organizations and individuals talked about their work in education, how it evolved over the years and their reflections from the work. One day of the forum was set aside for a discussion on Organization building. A few partners presented their approaches to organization development. Wipro's Chief Sustainability Officer, Anurag Behar, also shared Wipro's strategy and thrust on partner network expansion.

The first day saw four different partner organizations share their organizational journeys. The Rainbow Foundation team shared their experiences of working for the education of street children, how they developed a comprehensive educational support model for them at Rainbow homes in Delhi and how the approach is now spreading to many other cities. Disha India spoke about how they started with the idea of experiential learning and applied some of the principles from Gandhi's 'Nai Taleem' in today's context in schools and the lessons they learned in that journey. The Goodbooks team shared their work, promoting Indian children's literature among educators and parents through a professional online review platform for children's literature (Goodbooks.in), and Shikshamitra shared their journey of being a community school to evolving into a resource organization.

The second day had a diverse set of experiences and reflections from organizations and individuals who have been engaged in different kinds of work in education. Suhel Quader talked about Nature Conservation Foundation's (NCF) idea of nature education, the importance of children developing an emotional relationship with nature and NCF's efforts to weave this into their work. Arun Elassery shared reflections from his journeys to different alternative schools across the country. Jagjot Singh Sethi shared his personal narrative about how making films in education

led to finding a purpose beyond the self. The Teacher Foundation team shared the work that has been happening on social and emotional learning. The second day also had introductory presentations from some of our newer partners: Punarchith, JMECT and Vidya Mytri, who briefly shared about their organization, their area of work, challenges and their plans ahead.

The third day's focus was on organization development. Four long-term partners, Vidya Bhawan, Vikramshila, EZ Vidya and Eklavya shared their journey and insights on organization development over the years. Apart from a lively discussion around these presentations, there was also a moderated discussion on organizational development issues in the social sector and possible ways of addressing some of these. Anurag Behar shared about Wipro Applying Thought in Schools' evolving strategic priorities.

This book is an edited transcript of the presentations and discussions through the three days. Publishing and disseminating the proceedings is an attempt to take these discussions and reflections to the larger education community. We hope you will enjoy reading the proceedings and find it useful in your work and engagement with education.

Acknowledgement

A lot of effort went into making the 16th Wipro Partners' Forum happen the way it did and this book to come into being. We wish to express our sincere thanks to all speakers who shared their journeys and experiences; all our partner organizations and participants for their presence over the 3 days and for adding to the richness of discussions; the team at the School of Ancient Wisdom who hosted us; Jagjot, Maitreyee, Deeya and Madhavi for all their efforts towards making this compilation possible; and all others who lent us a hand and were party to this endeavour in various forms.

Avinash, Shaheen & Supriya

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Vijay Parmar, Jan Vikas
Yasmin Jayathirtha, Centre for Learning
Yogesh G R, Azim Premji Foundation

Addressing Educational Concerns– Experience Sharing by Organizations

Rainbow Foundation, Disha India, Goodbooks and Shikshamitra- all long-time partners of Wipro, share their experiences in addressing various concerns in education and their evolution over the several years that they have been working on the ground.

Evolving a comprehensive educational support model for street children– Rainbow Foundation

SHASHI MENDIRATTA has decades of education development experience as teacher, head of school, teacher educator and researcher. She is Director, at The Ferdinand Centre and has been a consultant with the Rainbow Foundation, India (RFI) and Rainbow Homes. RFI is the Indian central organization that manages and develops the Rainbow Homes for girls and Sneh Ghars for boys program with high-level personal and caring commitment. SATYA PILLAI and PREETI MATHEW are Director and Manager at the Knowledge and Policy Unit at Rainbow Homes, which is a resource centre with an in-depth understanding of the approaches, functioning and nuances of work around the Urban Street Child, with specific focus on the Non-Custodial, Comprehensive Care approach, Knowledge transfer, advocacy, manual, materials and capacity building.

Shashi Mendiratta: I am here to talk about our initiative with street children, and where it started from. Today it is across India. Basically, it is about street children in urban areas. You will hardly see any in villages, but in cities there are street children living in very difficult and dangerous situations.

We first thought about the Rainbow Foundation in 2005. It was an idea that grew, with help from a Netherlands based foundation which came in to look at street children and their condition in India and wanted to help them come out of their really difficult circumstances.

When we started, we had no design, no plan or road map. All we saw was these children, and we had an idea of what we should do for them. So we jumped right in. With Harsh Mander's strength, ideas and vision, we slowly moved ahead. How did that happen?

This is the journey of children from the streets into what we call Rainbow Homes. Any time you are in Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune, Patna, Kolkata or Delhi, please visit any of our children's homes there and you will see for yourself what we are speaking about.

Street children have categories. We have listed the ones we know, and there could be more that we do not know of. Children come from all kinds of stigmatized backgrounds – HIV, leprosy, AIDS, conflict zones, as children of sex workers, street children, orphaned or abandoned children... You may have seen them at traffic intersections, or ragpicking, or working in garages and dhabas, little children bringing you tea and snacks... I don't want to go into the details of who these children are, how they get there on the streets, and what kind of circumstances they find themselves in. That's a completely different story altogether, about where they come from, what happens, where they end up. Some end up with us, and I hope we are doing the right thing by them. But there are many who don't. We don't have the space.

There are many approaches to caring for children who do not have adult care – who may have parents, but they don't have the time to look after their children because they labour from morning till evening. And there are many children who have no adult supervision at all. They are on their own. In Delhi and other cities, these children congregate in specific places – in temples and mosques, under flyovers, on railway platforms or in bus stations where others like them live. There they form their own hangouts. Wherever they may roam during the day, they come there and they have a little community that supports them. Usually, the food comes from temples or mosques, or langar meals from gurudwaras. Generally, they have come to terms with their circumstances. They laugh a lot, but they are a highly deprived group.

If the government picks them up, they are put into institutional care. And if you look at children in institutional care you will be appalled at the conditions in which they live. It is like being in a semi-prison. There is a lot of abuse. You bring them into a home to protect them from the abuse outside, but here too they are not spared. So institutional care needs to be looked at closely, and there is a study being conducted by a research group.

There are also people who come to the railway platforms or other addas and hangouts – wherever the children are – and give support there. They provide healthcare and school support, and conduct games and fun activities. Children return from school to families who live on the streets, so they are gathered right there and helped with their studies. Or there are drop-in centres where children can go in any situation, and night shelters where they usually stay with their mothers. The shelters are actually for women, and sometimes the officials are very strict about it, but young children do come in at night.

The problem with some, or most, of these approaches are that they allow children to work. And we, like many others, believe that children need their childhood. You cannot take it away from them. Childhood is not for working. So a working child is a child deprived of the childhood over which he or she has a right. On-site or government care accepts the fact that during other hours children will be working – which is what we don't support.

We feel that the rights of these children who live in such care are indivisible. They cannot be segregated. You may offer school support but how do you expect a child to study if the stomach is empty? There is research that says a mind in pain cannot learn. A stomach that is hungry

also cannot learn. If we are unable to provide for the children's nutrition, care, health, day-to-day living, safety and security, we cannot say we are ensuring their rights by giving them education alone. So the indivisibility of a child's rights has to be understood when we provide care to children.

The Rainbow Homes or the care homes that we set up recognise that you need to care for children with dignity and respect. It is not charity but a rights based approach. Its ideation comes from what Sister Cyril did in Loreto in Sealdah, Kolkata, and the way she approached the care of street children. There are red-light areas around Sealdah, where there are many children. What did Sister Cyril do? She made those children come to the Loreto school early in the morning for classes. They would do their homework with help from the faculty there. They would have breakfast and then wear their uniforms, and go to nearby schools where Sister Cyril had made arrangements to admit them. So they would walk to these schools, in uniform, from Loreto – not from the red-light area. This completely changed the way in which those children were looked at in their schools. They did not have footwear, so Sister Cyril said no child would wear footwear in class, everybody would remain barefoot. In this way, she established a sense of equality and non-discrimination – and those children didn't feel there was something they didn't have.

These were things we picked up, and we adopted and expanded on the idea. The key thrust we brought in was partnership with public spaces, which could really take that idea to multiple locations. It didn't happen overnight. Over time we established a link with governments and with schools so that they would provide the space and we provided the care. A school provides space and some amenities. It may have a kitchen and bathrooms built and offer two or three rooms. Each school has the capacity to accommodate 50 to 100 children. Where government schools were under-utilized, where there were fewer children, there these homes were opened.

Delhi is the only exception where the homes are in buildings provided by the government. From that experience we realized that keeping children in a separate government building was great – we had that space – but getting them into school was a nightmare. From that learning, the Rainbow Foundation decided it was better to work within the government school itself. So now all homes in the other cities are located within government school premises. They have those three or two or four rooms, extra toilets, and kitchens, and the children go to that same school. This link with schools greatly helped in integrating the idea

of caring for street children, who are society's responsibility, with public spaces.

These are the principles on which all Rainbow Homes function. They are voluntary. They are non-custodial. No walls, no barbed wire, no lock-ups. Children come there of their own free will, and I think that's the critical part. They come there to look for a new beginning in life, and from there we start working with them. It is family linked and rights based. We give comprehensive care. It is participatory. It is unconditional. When children come, we don't ask them where they have come from, why they have come, why they have run away from home... no questions are asked. They want to come in, they are welcome. They can stay on and study.

These are our functioning values, which are democratic. We form children's committees and it is only through these that we formulate the systems for the home. We are secular. No one can discriminate.

Street children have a major issue with names. They come with multiple names – some Muslim names, some Hindu names, but mostly names of some cricketer or actor. We have several Abhishek Bachchans, Amitabh Bachchans, Sachins and other heroes and heroines among us! If nothing else, they prefix their own names with 'Aman', because we are from the Aman Biraadari, Aman Maiyam and so on.

At first, children would even run away. But we would wait. We were sure they would return. And they did. At present – and it is one of the criteria for assessing our success – children no longer run away. They stay right there.

Ours is a very child-centric approach. The only thing that probably gave us a road map was that the child was at the centre of our decisions. If something is necessary and good for the child, we continue to do it. If it doesn't benefit the child, we don't. We also used whatever empowering or enabling policies there were in SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) schemes and RTE (Right to Education). Our initiative is a part of the SSA schemes. They provide for street children in a like-minded manner.

When the children first came, it was a real battle to instil in them a sense of personal hygiene, to send them to school neat and clean. But today they are very presentable. They have learnt how to project themselves, gained in confidence. They speak with great articulation.

The buildings have libraries, computers, lockers, and spaces where they can sit and write. We also provide a few vocational pursuits – there are sewing machines and some things related to beauty culture. Currently, we are in seven cities – Pune, Patna, Bangalore, Kolkata,

Hyderabad, Chennai and Delhi – across seven states, with about 3,500 to 4,000 kids in our care. We run two kinds of homes. One is with the Rainbow Foundation itself. In each city, we have at least one home run by the foundation. The other homes are with a network, with people who share the same values and thinking, under one umbrella. We help them to understand how to deal with such children, what the government rules and regulations are and so on. We educate them on these issues and they work in collaboration with us. So in several places, the homes are run through this network, which is why we have been able to expand considerably.

We faced many challenges. What does a child first need when he or she is on the street? What is the CWC (Child Welfare Committee)? How do you interface with the police? When does the JJ (Juvenile Justice) Board come into all this? What do the SSA and the RMSA (Rashtra Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan) provide for, and how much? What are the kinds of rules and regulations and paperwork they want? What does the Education Department do? How do they come into the admissions and the EWS (Economically Weaker Sections) categories? Where does the WCD (Women and Child Department) and the NCPCR (National Commission for Protection of Child Rights) enter into the picture? I cannot tell you how confusing all of this was.

We are now beginning to somewhat understand these things. However, we still attend government seminars and conferences wherever they are held, where they explain who we are. We go there to comprehend what we can, because it is to do with children. They say we didn't do this or that, we need to first present ourselves to the police and get the DD (Daily Diary) entry number… We went through the grind, and now understand a little bit. And we are continuously staying ahead of the regulations.

We follow a comprehensive education concept. It has everything we hope a child needs – sports, computers, libraries, school support, bridge courses, recreation, enrichment, quizzing, exploring... everything. We looked at the child before designing it. What are children like? Their attention span is barely around five minutes. They sit. But if they step out, there's no question of returning. If they go to the bathroom, they disappear from there. It is very difficult to hold them down. Someone spoke about making them sit and listen to reason. I said, forget reasoning, let them sit down first, and then we can think of discussing things like education!

They are impulsive. If they're sleepy, no matter what you do they go

sleep in a corner. Discipline is also a bit of a problem. And learning levels – if there are 15 children, there are 15 levels! So it is really a challenge. A child could be 12 years old, but the learning level may be less than that of a six-year-old. The range will come. We take the youngest child, five-years-plus or six or seven years, and look at their needs right up to when they are 18 or above. So what I'm saying is that we've come to understand that any intervention involving children cannot stop at 14 years, whatever RTE might say. We are learning to negotiate around this.

The point we have set for ourselves for helping children is till they become socially and financially independent. It's a huge responsibility. So it's not an easy area to jump into. We jumped in without realizing that we would have to journey this far. But since we jumped in, we continued to work at it. And now, in the end, we have arrived at the transition for older children to start earning, which is our goal. We are now developing that, and it is happening.

This is how we manage the education process. There are some education coordinators, and full time and part time teachers. We have a review process twice a year, where we discuss things among ourselves. Each child has a personal education plan which takes note of what s/he needs – does s/he have special needs? If yes, how does one cope with that? Is s/he more inclined towards dance or karate? A record is maintained for each child with all these perspectives.

There is a bridge course that we make new entrants go through. We also have an English-speaking course which, however, has not been very successful largely because we don't get good English teachers. It is very hard to find someone. Even when we do, they come and go. We have had a floating population of English teachers whom we haven't been able to retain.

We have also developed a life-skills curriculum, in-house. We have done it for children and are working on doing it for the older ones, which is our goal. Teacher capacity grows along with curriculum development. We cannot wait to build a curriculum and then orient them to it. They happen simultaneously. It is not just about teacher capacity but whole capacity, because everybody in the home has some kind of specialized input.

The factors that help us are funders' support, the help from Bodh in developing our bridge course (they spent three years with us), and a group of teachers that has kept us bonded. We were just discussing that if they were BEds, they would probably have left us. But because they are

not, and because they share a certain bond with us, they are there. The children have grown from little to big, but they are told, "So what if you have sprouted a beard? You are still the same!" Without these special bonds, children don't learn.

Teachers at the homes have become coordinators, so they know what a child needs. We have ample support from sensitive institutions. There is a lady who has set up a library in every home. She has coordinated this so beautifully that we are deeply grateful to her. There are other individuals like her. Then there are institutions like Deloitte that give scholarships. Now that we are established, people come and see us. They get impressed and praise the good work that is happening. They come to do and to give, from the heart.

The challenges, I think, everybody knows. The main problem is the discrimination these children face in the classroom – in teacher attitudes as well as among the other children. We are trying to minimize that by building relationships. Other challenges include payment delays and SSA norms. You can ask us about these later if you like, and we can tell you how much we struggled to understand and explain that the RSBCs (Residential Bridge Course Programmes) or special training centres are operational only ten months a year – so where does a street child go during the other two months? We're told that in ten months we should complete their training so they're ready for school and that's it, get ready for the next batch... It is easy to say that, but where do these children go? We are trying to advocate the idea that a child has to have a home before s/he can do anything in school.

Then, with regard to retaining the younger children, the government comes out with rules. We go to schools or the SSA, and ask about these but are told that they haven't received any orders or papers. These are all challenges.

We try to do the right thing by keeping the focus on the child, always looking at things from the child's point of view, trying to look for reasons. If a child comes and says, "I don't want to go to school," we do not label that as stubbornness or stupidity. We try to reason that something must have happened in school for the child to say that, and which is why they don't want to go. So we try to analyse instead of thinking that there is a motive behind it or just laziness. I'm not saying it can't be that – sometimes it is. But we try to reach the core of the problem.

We also have to look at our concepts of right and wrong. What is stealing? When you pick up something, is that really stealing? Why do

children sometimes take things without asking? Sometimes they sell these things and use the money to buy and do drugs. We can call this behaviour wrong. But it is not as if the children are morally depraved. So we re-examine our ideas of right and wrong, and try to keep ourselves as open-minded as we can.

We give the children time to grow gradually, at their own pace. It is not as if we put them in a mould and rush them through the growth process. That way, we may have managed them better. But management of children is not the goal – letting them grow at their own pace is. We want to establish forums for them to talk fearlessly. You can come and see for yourself – you will find that the children speak to you without fear. They will confidently tell you what they like or dislike. This free and fearless communication, which happens through a democratic process, is a great thing.

So this is our model. It is sustainable. It has the power to reach every child. Any street child in a school can learn and become a responsible person. Governments can apply this model to all cities if they choose to. That way, cities will have fewer street children. The basic development challenges and emotional traumas of a street child are difficult to gauge. From the comfort of our homes we can only have an overall idea of their lives – understanding them takes time.

Q&A

Vijay Gupta: Shashi, through this project, what has been your learning about how we should engage with the children in terms of language teaching or mathematics teaching? By working with such diverse children, have you been able to crack that?

Shashi: What we've realized is that children don't learn in abstraction. We cannot put something on the board and say carry this amount over this way. They need to actually do the work. The teachers use pebbles, leaves and board materials on which they draw lines, they make pictures and do a lot of visual work.

Also, we tried to bring in out-of-the-box thinking and creativity through project based learning. We do a lot of that. And I think that is where we thematically bring in all their subjects together. We take them to the zoo, or the vegetable market, post office, or fire brigade. They go in

groups. It's not just a visit where they go in the car or bus, have a snack and come back. We make arrangements with the post office or vegetable market managers. We tell them, the children will come to meet you and ask some questions – who among you will be available that day? Then we assign groups of children to them. We prepare the children: What will you ask? If you go to a zoo, find out which place an animal is from, what it eats, what diseases it may have, what the vet says about it... all of that.

They come back, compile and present the information. For the presentation, we bring in people from among our friends. They come and see, and ask questions. The children are able to explain – this is what was said, these are the medicines used, this is how this animal came to be here, this one likes to stay cool which is why a pool has been made, and so on. So project based learning is highly beneficial. They learn with a lot of enthusiasm. If anyone asks them what one should do if the situation were a bit different, they will receive an answer with a well thought out solution.

Teachers have to be very persistent. Teaching the three letters 'ka-kha-ga' could take about ten days. One day you teach them 'ka', and the next day they ask "What?" The grasp is slow. But if you keep patiently reiterating it for 15-20 days, you crack it. Then they go faster. Initially it is so extremely, painstakingly and frustratingly slow that you feel like labelling that child as a slow learner who needs a special school. But that's not necessary. You have to stay with the child. Some of the older teachers have been able to do it.

We are also very conscious about attention span. Researchers and those here would know that normally a child's attention span is double his or her age. At six years, they can concentrate for 12-15 minutes. We don't hold them beyond five minutes. Whatever we need to teach them, we try and explain to them in those five minutes when they still have some focus, breaking up lessons into small fragments.

We use a lot of the outside and inside. We take them out, bring them in, and discuss how many steps we took either way. If there is a quarrel regarding turns at the swing, we say, "Okay, you get ten turns, you get twelve, you get six," and so on. That way, we combine counting with real tasks.

Initially, this is required. Later, they begin to understand. Once they come to a certain level and establish a foundation in school, they turn out all right.

Lokesh: You mentioned Rainbow Homes. I would like to know how children feel about the word 'home'. Do they feel it is where their parents stay and a shelter where they can come whenever they wish? Or do they, with time, develop the feeling of this being their home, a place where they will stay forever, that the people here are their parents?

Amit: In what you've presented, you mentioned several qualities. However – maybe you overlooked it or whatever – you said the children were weak, had low attention spans, would run away, go to sleep and so on. But what are their strengths? They would be independent, wouldn't they? They would also come in with some knowledge from their past? Could you tell us about their inherent strengths and knowledge, and how you utilize these in your work?

Keerti: You have these different partners, so when you go to a new place, what is the establishment process? Have you been able to identify a process for bringing everyone on the same wavelength? The second question is about capacity building of people on your team. How does that happen?

Hari: My question is sort of connected. If I am right, you began the journey in 2005. We are in 2016, and you have really grown in that period of time. Issues of processing and systems come into play when you get larger – many branches and so on. But a significant amount of your conversation today was around focusing on, or customizing, intervention towards a child. Hence, a very fundamental question: Would you want to grow large or remain small?

Anjali: There are two or three questions of a fundamental nature. There are other groups here too – for instance, Muskaan – and I would like them also to share their perspective.

There is this relationship between children and work, the definition of childhood and the evolution of childhood, which is actually not very old, and which separates childhood from work and reality, treating it like a very delicate stage. Taking childhood as an integral part in which we must accept the importance of work – as Makarenko has said, Summerhil too, which CWC has as one of their perspectives, and which is also probably a perspective of Muskaan – we need to have a discussion on the child's right to work and to education. Because, probably, the problem

is not that children work. The problem is that some children – a certain type of children – do certain oppressive jobs, while other children do nothing at all. The NCF (National Curriculum Framework) outlines the relationship between work and childhood too. So I feel we must set aside some time at this Forum to discuss this issue, and see what Muskaan and others can do.

Secondly, on the one hand, the system creates policies and acts, and gives space for homes for such children. On the other hand, the same system and the people who work within it – the police, or those in custodial homes – account for most of the contraventions, which are very brutal and disgusting. There was no mention of this by Rainbow Foundation, which is why I'm bringing it up. The trauma that follows – there are studies on these, including in Bhopal – when you hear of it, your heart breaks... the things that happen to a child aged three or four who is sleeping on the street. As civil society organizations, what is our role in facing this conflict and pressurizing the system to work on it?

Thirdly, what is our take on the political economy that these street children create? The sort of policies that promote marginalization and increase the number of people below poverty line, so much so that they try to push the poverty line even lower... what is the Rainbow Foundation's perspective on this marginalization and our work with these communities?

Ramkumar: Why do we label children as 'street children'?

Shashi: Preeti of Rainbow Foundation will tell you about what the children think of us. Satya too has been working closely with the homes in Delhi.

Preeti: The set of children who are with us are broadly those who don't have parents. So their identity of a shelter, or a roof over their head, is the home that they are in right now, and therefore their attachment and their understanding of a home is the Rainbow Home. And for the boys, it's the Sneh Ghar, as we call it.

But for children who have some kind of attachment with their distant relatives or people associated with them while they were on the streets, we continue that link. Our social mobilizers, our team members and the children themselves have constant contact with them, because we believe that every child has a right to connect to family and retain those

ties. To the extent that if we find that those adults have moved to a stage where they can take care of the children, we encourage restoration to those families, but after a thorough assessment.

For the other children, it is a constant search for roots – about who they can call their parents, their didi (elder sister). After they get into a job, whom do they come back to and relate to? So we continue to be there with them, guiding them, being with them and supporting them – because for them, I think, the first adults they could trust were the people in the home.

The challenge is when some young adults decide to break the bond and say, "Now I have a job and I want to go away and not remain connected." We grapple with that, and with some children who just cut off ties – they don't want to retain them. There are others who keep coming, and we see the constant support they need from us.

As an organization, what we grapple with also is the fact that the staff is also a changing team. Nobody stays in an organization forever. So the adults the children connect to may be ones who were there four-five years ago. How do they still retain touch? To keep that bond alive is a challenge we work with.

But of course, for most children, the identity still remains the Rainbow Home. Even their name carries Aman, a part of our name, which some children have chosen to take as their last name, rather than any other. So their identity – their pehchaan, as we say – is us.

However, we have also seen children who don't want to be called out in forums as children from the Rainbow Home or who have associated with us. They don't want people to know about their past. They don't want to be labelled as 'street children'. Some boys don't want to come out in a public forum and meet Harsh because then it will be known that they were with us. But that is a choice that the child, or young person, needs to be given – whether they want to project themselves with that past, or deny it.

Satya: There was a question on training, about preparing people to handle things. Initially, we thought that it was not a big deal. How difficult could it be to look after children? After all, everybody has them, and bringing 25-30 children into a home with all the facilities available ahouldn't be difficult.

We soon realized that at one level children were all same, but there were very specific things about children who have been on the street –

very basic ways of communicating or talking to each other, how they eat, how they manage their time, etc., and that it wasn't going to be so simple. Over a period of time, with trial and error, we figured out what worked, and we managed to document it.

Now we have a system where we take all our people – we call them 'sneh saathi' (loving companions) because it's a relationship of love and affection that we try to build – through a very intensive training programme. Everything relating to how to set up a home in a comfortable and safe way, how to actually make the child comfortable in this new set-up, how to work with the families, how to organize education, how to cook meals in an exciting way so that a child doesn't get bored of eating the same kind of food... all aspects of bringing up a child.

We first figured it out, documented it, and then took it back to the sneh saathis. So now we have a very, very committed and organically driven workforce doing this day after day. Of course, there are frustrations and challenges. But we manage to do good work. Sometimes we get across to them specifically to manage frustrations that they might still be facing. So a programme of caring of carers is also in place.

Preeti: One of you asked whether we will remain small as an intervention or if we want to spread. The idea is not about us doing it. Therefore our belief has been from the beginning that we also partner with NGOs.

I will combine that question with how we bring in a new organization which has a different set of agendas. The way we see it is that we have a set of values that we really care about. We look forward to implementing those values whenever we work with children and adults, and select carers who will also stand by them, come what may. The child has to be at the centre. We are referred to organizations by well-meaning individuals in cities who see that our organization is doing well. We try to understand that organization – how they match up to what we think is the quality of care, our approach... When there is an understanding of the approach, we definitely like to partner them. But that happens gradually, with us coming in at different stages with regard to capacity building and raising funds.

About how we want to expand this, we see this work as not being limited to just a few metropolitan cities but happening in the Tier 2 cities also, where there are a large number of street children. We look at it in two ways. One is reaching out to more children, but reaching out through the government and through like-minded NGOs. Also, we now

look forward to training these organizations and becoming more of a resource centre, so we can reach out to more children and not limit it to ourselves.

We still want to continue implementing the core programme which we own, and we have a lot of learnings rooted there. But at the same time, we want to bring in more organizations who believe in working for the last child on the street. The debate has been: How many street children really need residential care? We talk about the set of children who are in dire need of shelter, care and protection, without which maybe a lot of them might turn out to be the boy who was involved in the Nirbhaya case. He was not cared for and he turned to crime. Are we going to wait for many instances of this, or reach out to those children and give them the kind of care with which they can come out of the vicious circle?

So we definitely believe in expanding across many cities, but with help from the government, because we don't believe this can happen without its support and solidarity.

Shashi: I'd like to take Anjali's question on the debate around a working child. I don't think this Forum is geared towards debating that. As people who work with children, there is this continuous dichotomy that we deal with, and one that at least I keep thinking about.

On the street, alone or even with a set of buddies, and some protector or godfather who takes care of them, their money, their belongings, their little-little things keep these children together. They develop – this also is connected to what Vijay asked – a kind of personality that has immense strengths. It is because they are on the street. It is because they are exposed to so much evil, to everything that can happen in the darkness of the nights – and believe me, a lot of things happen. Before they are able to understand or even spell the word, they know what pornography is. They spend the whole night watching those movies in little tents on the roadsides. They smell glue and other things, and even peddle it. They are engaged in petty thefts, crime... Which is why the JJ Board is another institution with which we are constantly at loggerheads.

They have several strengths solely because of their life on the streets. Their street-smartness is remarkable. They are no intellectuals, but they are extremely smart and intelligent. They know exactly how to stay out of the law, hide from it, or save themselves – self-preservation is very high. Also, without maybe having gone to school, they know how to operate many things – from using mobiles to driving a vehicle, they know it all.

Ticketless travelling is no big deal for them. They can go from a village in Bihar to the suburbs of Mumbai without any money.

Once we bring these children into our homes, tend to them with love and care and send them to school, we feel that somewhere along the way they lose some of these strengths, they gradually diminish. The other strengths that should develop – their education, the personality development that should come with the confidence of being in a place so different from their origins – it takes us time to achieve these. And sometimes we fail to do that in totality.

Wherever these children might be they form a community for themselves. This community, which is a very fragile support system, is of their own making – we haven't created it for them. That breaks down. And the structure that we create for them, it takes them time for them to blend into.

This is a huge question to which I don't have an answer. We are embroiled with questions within questions. But we don't lose faith. There are some people in whose views we trust implicitly. They say that you cannot rob children of their childhood. Childhood is a time for fun and frolic, and you are making them work. In a way, it is a tacit agreement to let them work.

Now, we have tried to come to a middle path in which until the age of 14 we do not expect them to go to work. But during the last year and a half or so, we have been giving the option of 'learning and earning' to children who complete 14 and step into the 15th year. This is an initiative we have started where we try and place them in small part-time jobs. This way, they earn some income which is saved in their name.

They continue with their studies, either in school or through the NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling). But we do give them the option of this learning-earning combination because although under SSA norms they are not considered children once they turn 14, at that age they are independent neither socially, nor financially, psychologically or emotionally – in no way. So, keeping these requirements in mind of keeping them in a socially and emotionally secure environment, we still provide these opportunities to work and to earn and to learn. I am not saying this is the ultimate solution. We have kind of moved to incorporate this working child. They too, because of their origins, have this deep desire to make money, a deep desire to run ahead in life, and big ambitions. How to manage all of this – these desires and wishes – with the reality of their core competencies and what society and the

employment sector demands is still a situation we're grappling with.

Vijay had asked, how do we utilize their inherent strengths? We try and root their cleverness in them. They figure out things very fast. Like I said, teaching them numbers through a mobile phone was probably the easiest thing to do. So making that kind of link with what they are able to manage is important.

Thank you so much, everybody.

Recreating Nai Taleem in today's context– Disha India

PARMINDER SINGH RAPARIA (Pammi) and MEENU TOMAR are co-founders and trustees of Disha India. They have led several whole school transformation projects with varying challenges and complexities, including one at the Heritage School, Gurgaon. Inspired by Gandhian principles of work-centered education, they founded Disha India Education Foundation almost a decade back. They are committed to the idea of making productive work as a pedagogic medium of teaching and learning in schools.

Parminder: Our efforts have been to understand Nai Taleem – basically, the Gandhian idea of education – in today's context. It has been ten years for us now, and we'll share with you the learnings and work we have done so far, where we are, and the next steps that we are thinking of.

We started in 2006. Earlier, the vision had been to create a curriculum and pedagogy based on experiential learning. This is what we actually wanted to do – to set up a working model, a school where we could demonstrate how it works. Keeping that in mind, we bought land in Karnal – it is my hometown in Haryana – but it didn't work out because of politics, change of leadership, and a lot of corruption in the system. So we gave up that idea.

But in the last ten years, the theory of learning that has guided our work is, first, learning through real-life experiences from the child's local context. We have been trying to base our curriculum and pedagogy on this principle. Secondly, how can we use productive work, in the children's context, as a pedagogic medium for teaching and learning? The third is the integration of head, heart and hands in the whole learning process.

We also wanted to bridge the gap between school and society. We saw that in schools, over time, this gap increases. With a big boundary wall, gates, and security, even physically a school has become very unapproachable, not easily accessible. But here we are looking at it more from the pedagogic point of view. Can we use real-life experiences as a pedagogic medium?

There is an experiential cycle which we generally use to design learning. We take concrete real-life experiences from the children's context, then help them reflect over them and see patterns, connections... help them conceptualize and analyse what they have absorbed, and put them into theory. Conceptualization, analysis, and then application – this is the cycle we use to design and facilitate the learning process.

Our areas of work are school development projects, the 'Courage to Lead and Teach' programme, learning expeditions for educators and students, and an ongoing research project. I will explain what we mean when we say 'expedition' – it is more than a project.

We have done two-three school development projects in the last ten years, taking curriculum concepts and skills and then using real-life experience as the pedagogic medium. So the context and pedagogy we take from real-life and then try to address and develop concepts and skills through that.

If you really want to change the pedagogy, you need to rework structures like curriculum mapping and integration, day structure – how a day looks like in school, and classroom structure – physical design of the classroom. Then there is integrating assessments with the pedagogy, classroom culture, planning and review with teachers, communication, and parents' engagement. These are some of the structures that we work with in all our school development projects. Teachers' capacity building and leadership development, and shared vision are also areas in which we work.

Among the expeditions we did was 'How Bike-friendly is Gurgaon as a city?' Is it safe for cyclists or not? Children from Grades 6 and 7 have been doing this project every year for almost five-six years. They compile their reports, then go and meet the traffic police and the administration, and even do a campaign on how we could make Gurgaon a bike-friendly city. This actually played a very important role in making Raahgiri start in Gurgaon.

Another project was 'Trees of My Neighbourhood' or 'How green is my school?' based on the GSP (Green Schools Programme) manual.

'How Safe is My Neighbourhood for Children?' was on child rights. Children did research and surveys on what rights they were being granted and what they were not, and based on that a campaign was designed and worked on.

'Nature our Teacher' is about some of the innovations inspired from nature, and this is a Grade 4 expedition.

'I Am What I Eat' is about a balanced diet, healthy food, how healthy food is grown and cooked, and so on.

We have taken all these expeditions from the curriculum. I think the Grade 7 NCERT book has a complete chapter on Child Rights and Campaign – how to design and carry out a campaign on child rights, so children experience the whole process. Similarly, 'I Am What I Eat' takes

science concepts from Grade 6 about food, a balanced diet and farming. 'How a Historian Works' is again for Grades 5 and 6, based on the skills that a historian requires to decipher history from different sources.

There is one on how our needs evolved over time and how they impacted the social, political and economic structures. We mapped pre-seventh-century history, and do the curriculum through this expedition.

There is a framework for each expedition, with its own big idea and guiding questions. We take learning targets and make an assessment plan. Then we design 'Hook and BBK', a pre-launch exercise to be done before we start working – about how to hook children to the whole idea and build background knowledge, how to expose them to the multiple perspectives for the given topic or concept.

Then comes crew building. All expeditions take place in small groups of four to five students, and they work and sit together in these teams throughout.

Each expedition has one, two or three projects. Each project includes a case study and language skill development. Reading and writing is completely integrated into this, and it works very well. There are mini lessons and workshops based on the concepts and skills we want to address, and we develop field visits and working with real-life experts. A project has its own end product and performance – the important thing is to have an authentic purpose and audience that makes the whole learning real for them. Let's take this bicycle project. It entails writing a report which they can present to the administration. The real purpose is to have an authentic audience.

There is a final challenge to which we link our summative assessment and service. Service means, once you have learnt whatever you have to, how do you now give back to society? The culmination is where we share our learning with the parents and the community.

Some of the schools, mainly private, we have worked with in the last ten years are the Heritage Schools in Gurgaon and Vasant Kunj, Vidya Bhawan Basic School in Udaipur, and Jindal Modern School in Hisar. At Heritage School, Gurgaon, we have worked very closely with more than 400 educators. Especially in the middle school there, we have been able to design the whole curriculum based on experiential learning – from Grade 4 to 7. With the other schools we have tried to see how we could reinvent the Nai Taleem concept.

This was about school development projects. Then we have had a programme for educators – teachers and principals – from 2008. We do

one programme in a year. It is a 12-day, certified, residential programme in experiential education. So far, 300 educators from 50 different schools and organizations have been part of it. I can say that out of the 300, we have been able to impact 50 of them. About ten schools are now working on this idea, using our projects and pedagogy. We have differential fee structures for this programme (more than 50 per cent educators avail scholarships), and it is held in partnership with Experience Based Learning Systems developed by Dr Kolb.

Our other programme 'Khoj' is again an outbound learning expedition that we do with schools, again based on the curriculum. We design pre and post activities for the curriculum, which they do in the school and in their own cities. Teachers and parents are the facilitators. Generally, this expedition is for four to 12 weeks, with five-six days of outbound work.

'Be the Change', which we have been doing in Rajasthan on child rights with Urmul, is part of this initiative. Then we recently started the 'Natural Farming and Farmers' expedition in Punjab, where we work with farmers and stay with them. 'How a Historian Works' in Fatehpur Sikri, 'Nature our Teacher' in Bharatpur, 'Crafts and Craftsmen' with weavers in Rajasthan, again with Urmul, and 'Jungle Expedition' in Corbett are some of the other expeditions. So far, 10,000 students, 500 teachers and 100 parents from eight different schools have been part of this.

In a research project we are doing with Dr Kolb, we are trying to define the educator's profile – meaning, to facilitate experiential learning inside the classroom, what are the skills required, and what is the role a teacher needs to perform? In this, we have been working especially with regard to K-12 teachers. We are also designing a lesson planning template, based again on experiential learning. We have been working on these two projects for the last four years and would be happy to share the findings with you.

So, in the tenth year, where are we? I think we can say that we now have a theory for experiential education, which comes in three-four strands. One is obviously Kolb's theory of experiential learning. Then there is the whole Gandhian idea of productive work as a pedagogic medium. This has really worked very well for us. We have used carpentry, weaving, repairing bicycles... In each expedition, there is a strong component of doing, of working with the hands, which has to be from a real-life context, and with an authentic audience and purpose.

The Expeditionary Learning Theory is an organization in the US that works with public schools there. The experiential learning we get

from Gandhi and Kolb, and the pedagogy – how to transact it inside the classroom, the protocols, the systems, how to integrate assessment – we get from Expeditionary Learning.

Obviously, there was also a lot of reading and understanding of Prof. Anil Sadgopal's idea of work-centred education. And nowadays, we are also trying to understand integral education from the point of view of the personal self and the culture. You see, we started with circle time, but now we realize that this self-awareness and development is important. This is something that we have now taken up. We have a framework for an experiential curriculum and pedagogy, which we can share with you. It is on our website, and you can download it. It works. It is effective. We also have a theory regarding school transformation.

This is where we see ourselves. We have a team of 10-12 learning designers, and some good partnerships, collaborations and mentors. We are now self-sustaining, and have resources. It took us ten years. We have low overhead costs and expenses, and thereby the freedom to do what we believe is important. We also have a core team.

One of our big learnings, especially after working with private schools, is that education in private schools disconnects children from their local context. It is very abstract, very cognitive and very skill-based. Secondly, for children, it is very difficult to follow this whole idea of "How can I connect with the local context?" and also thereby "How can I contribute to my community? How can I bring change?" This is very difficult for them to figure out because they are confined within the classroom, the school, the fort... the whole structure.

The relationship between work and doing is very vague. First of all, they don't work much, they don't have this concept of working with hands and secondly, I think I will say again, it is very abstract. The whole idea is about getting admissions and jobs. I also believe they are very much driven by the corporate agenda – 21st century skills – and we are questioning that.

It is very sad that this is our learning after ten years. This whole system destroys a child's capacity to think, create change – and, most importantly, how to be self-reliant, which I think it is a big thing. It is more about their being prepared for jobs, which is being dependent. The system wants people who can work for them. And this is what nobody realizes, that the education system in these schools is putting an end to self-reliance.

Education is also becoming very expensive, and I don't know whether

it is sustainable or not – also whether it is right or not. Is it by design? That is a big question. We think it is. Can we bring change in private schools? Whether it is worth the effort is a question that came to our minds after ten years. It is too dependent on individuals. We all say that it is very easy to get work started and done in private schools. But it can also finish and close very fast.

Every three years, you will find a new fad. I still remember, when we started it was MI-10, Domains of Learning, and then assessment. These days, a lot of things are going on and I think experiential learning is also about to become a fad. Things change too fast.

It is all too structured. Look at the time-table – 20 minutes, 30 minutes... all structured. It is also too fragmented, too big and heavy. And the biggest flaw is this client and service mindset: do whatever parents say, keep them satisfied. It is market-driven, a very 'busy' culture – the whole idea is to keep people busy – and there is too large a gap between school and society.

Schools are big and powerful, whereas teachers are weak. There is a lot of fear. The culture in private schools is such that you will see the same kind of relationship in the principal's room between principal and teacher, as between child and teacher in the classroom. The same kind of relationship exists between the principal and the management, and between the management and any top authority. There is no difference. There is a lot of fear, a high attrition rate, and it is too resource intensive – therefore finance and numbers are very important.

Our learning is that education should be free and for all, local, with some doing and creating, and should develop the capacity to be self-reliant. Why can't we have a common school system? Why shouldn't it be free?

Some more questions that come to mind are: Why are communities losing faith in our government schools? Why are they not engaged with them? We do have RTE (Right to Education) now – why don't they still see hope? Who is encouraging privatization of education and why? Why is the government not making education happen? We have some good models of government schools – Kendriya Vidyalaya, Navodaya, etc. The government can do it – it has the infrastructure and resources to make things happen. Teachers too are qualified and more connected to the local context.

Problems can't be solved at the level at which they are created. So we think we need to come together as a community. If we come together we

can fight and be victorious. That is the approach we have to take, we feel now. But how can we get the community together?

Some of the regrets of the last ten years are: We spent too much time and energy in creating an ideal model. We didn't think things through adequately and wasted too much of energy and time climbing the wrong wall. We took too long to become self-reliant.

Moving forward, in the next ten years I think we would want to continue with experiential and real education. Can we create a community based government school model in the rural context? Can we get the community together around work? I think getting the community together should be around work. Apart from the Gandhian idea of work as pedagogy, the community also needs a motivation to come together. Education alone will not do. So we are thinking of converging it around work.

Then, can we work with government schools? We are thinking of creating a community based government school – perhaps taking farming and craft as pedagogic mediums. Let's create a cooperative first with people in the rural context – natural farmers, landless farmers, small farmers. Let's talk to them. Let's become self-reliant, strong, and take charge of the local government schools. We'd also like to make the 'Courage to Lead and Teach' programme bilingual now for government teachers and local youth, and offer full scholarships.

Q&A

Chandrashekar: A lot of what you spoke is my language – a lot of my learnings. I am very sympathetic to it. I am also quite empathetic with it because I have seen a lot of this in the work that I am doing. I want to make two or three very quick points.

One is, you mentioned 21st century education and you referred to the corporates. I think you should nuance it a little bit more. We had a conference about two years ago on Geography education for the 21st century, the idea being that new technologies and new ways of looking at things are actually coming in, which are very powerful and very useful. So I think that part of it is actually quite welcome and needed. What we need is, I think, a new mindset that gives us the ethical framework in which to work, rather than simply becoming corporate roles, as it were. So there is a lot of that concern, which I felt the need to share with you.

Secondly, I like the way you have been trying to work with private schools. Some of the issues you have faced, I too see that a lot. Attrition among the educators – a very, very high turnover rate. That's again very similar to the corporate environment where if I get a better offer tomorrow, I up and leave. So the fact that with that system you have still worked so much is very commendable.

Finally, all of this work that you have done is very impressive. Experiential learning is the way to go. We all agree with that. But, at the same time, you still have to regurgitate answers in the exam, score the marks and get the certificate. How have you dealt with that part? That is my question.

Kanupriya: My question is to do with this idea of yours that, going forward, there is the need for a common neighbourhood school. I don't know if, in the areas that you work in, the RTE's 25 per cent reservation up to Class 12 has come in. Have they started taking children in? And how do you see that as an avenue for building a common school? Because 25 per cent is only the minimum, the government has not defined a maximum. So if a school wants, it can even be 50-50 or 100 per cent, or whatever.

So there are two ways to look at it. One is that we empower government schools. Experiential learning and community mobilization is one medium. The second is about private schools, going back to what we were just discussing – not to negate these 21st century skills, since some of them are very important. When you have Google Maps, how do you use that to teach Geography? The whole idea of navigation using a map has changed. But why should this be only for a Heritage, Gurgaon, and not for the government school that is nearby?

So which skills are for whom? And then, can the common school be turned on its head, and can we look at the private school as the common school, through that 25 per cent?

Amit: I have three points. One is that I am very impressed by your work. More than your work, I like the fact that you have questions, because after five to ten years of working most people stop questioning and try to provide answers. I am glad that you continue to question.

The second is that you did not elaborate upon what exactly happens and how. I would like to learn more about that. We can discuss it here, or outside.

The third is about the numbers you have given – 100 schools, so many children, etc. Do you have any case studies to show that children have benefited from your model? If you could share them through a website or blog, they could perhaps benefit a lot more people.

Maya: I have two questions. I also enjoyed your presentation because it was hard-hitting and I think that is good. One is a very technical question. How do you distinguish between experiential and expeditionary learning? Wouldn't they be similar?

Secondly, this whole thing about mobilizing community – do you think that the community wants a different kind of education from what we see in the market, in all urban cities and areas? I completely agree that there is this complete busy-ness about our schools – about being busy with a lot of non-essentials rather than essentials. I was recently in Mumbai with the Publications Division, and they said that when they get into the market they find that parents are looking at which publishers are providing more books for a particular subject for each level. So Grade 3, they need five books for English, five books for Science, a workbook, some reader, and something else. So are we enlightened as yet? It is becoming a nice self-serving thing – schools, community, teachers... And teachers, of course, are victims in the whole process.

Parminder: The first question was about marks. In our experience of the last ten years based on this learning through real-life experiences and learning by doing, I think children have performed far better than what they used to earlier. One of the benchmarks you can take is that students who have gone through this take ASSET (Assessment of Scholastic Skills through Educational Testing) regularly, and they have done well.

Meenu: When we talk of language and self-expression, it has really worked wonders. And we are not teaching them that separately, as he already shared. It's a part of the expedition.

Parminder: I think that is one. The school can share reports. But we can also say that since ASSET has multiple-choice questions, it may not be the right way to check understanding. Understanding, yes; but application of the concept, that is something we can talk about.

The second is whether private schools can become common schools. No, we should not even think of it. It would be wrong. It's not about being

corporate – the basic foundation is wrong. How can we have education where we have to pay so much? It is not sustainable. If you see, in good schools people pay eight to ten thousand rupees per month. This is the way they want us to get into this whole loop of high expenses and EMIs. We get so busy with that, we can't think. Then we say our communities are not engaged – it's because people don't have the time to get engaged with education, they are so busy earning a livelihood.

Health and education – these things should be free. And we don't agree with this 25 per cent reservation. It is not working in private schools.

Meenu: I don't think there is still even 25 per cent integration. And secondly, it is our right to get our education free from the government. We should not ward it off to the private owners.

Parminder: Our experience says that the only way to build our future in education is through the government. It should be free and of high quality. That is why this 25 per cent 50 per cent will not work, and should not work. These suggestions are just a waste of time.

The next question was about assessment. How do we do assess? We have learnt a lot about experiential learning and how it is happening in public schools. We got a lot of inputs from one of our mentors, Steven Levy, who has worked with the public school system for 30 years – how to do mini lessons, reading and writing workshops, and assessment for and of learning. We can share all this, and our lesson plans, with all with you.

Meenu: Experiential versus expeditionary – that's the other question.

Parminder: Expeditionary learning came from the concept of Outward Bound – when people go out on a challenge they engage with each other and work in teams. Kurt Hahn started the first such school in the UK, and even the IB (International Baccalaureate) schools have come from there.

From there the idea was taken into the classroom. That is why they call it expeditionary learning and experiential learning – both. A project is more than activities – it is a collection of activities. And an expedition is more than a collection of projects. We can't say that two or three projects form an expedition. No. It is working in groups, skill building, service too is a very important part, and it has to be in your local context.

We were inspired by the whole idea of Gandhiji's thinking of how we

can use the local context, and we got this framework which really helped us to do that. Also, private schools are fond of the nomenclature – people really like it.

Meenu: Next – does the community want a different school system? Or do we just want to keep the kids busy?

Parminder: You all tell me. What is the use of such expensive education? We need to move on and engage in dialogue with the community. Why not?

Meenu: I think the problem here is that the community doesn't know how to go about it. That's the kind of question we grapple with often.

Parminder: Our experience says that a lot of people want to do good things. But the problem is how to do it, how to bring change.

Meenu: That is where our educational system is lacking anyway.

Maya: I definitely agree that there are a lot of individuals who want change. But the vast majority of parents are so worried – and fearful – about their children being left behind in this race for better marks, better jobs and all that, they are constantly trying to overload kids with as many experiences, books and resources as possible, so that their child is not at a disadvantage compared to somebody else's. That is what we need to change.

Meenu: When the model works, everything changes. That's what we've seen even with the Heritage School. Initially the biggest fear is the parents', of course – everywhere. Once it works, when the child starts achieving – whether it's marks or assessment, projects, writing or reading skills – those questions are addressed.

Parminder: Somehow parents have also lost faith in the education system. Why are they asking for marks? Because they know it's easy. That's why they are saying, "Don't talk too much about all this, just get us the marks" –because it's easy. When we said we would do projects, parents wanted to know only one thing from us: "Are you prepared? Do you know what you want to do?" They were looking for confidence in us.

So if they think we have done our homework, they will support us.

But generally, parents see the school system. They don't have faith because they don't see planning and preparation. And that is why they think it's better to focus only on marks.

Meenu: But now they've moved on even from marks. They want tutorial groups and websites and all that, which will supposedly provide marks. So they've lost faith there as well. That's why, I think, the resources are increasing.

Yasmin: I was thinking that the RTE in fact says that children shouldn't work. So now we are caught in this dilemma that the RTE which wants to bring children into education is kind of going against the idea of Nai Taleem. You have to work at that level to bring about change.

Parminder: It is not about doing work, but about using work as a pedagogic medium. This is very different. We were working on this whole concept of 'Fibre to Fabric', and in Grade 6 Science there are three whole chapters on this. When children sat on looms, and when they started weaving on their own in small groups, the kind of engagement with the whole thing and the whole concept that we developed – it wasn't work. It was an art form – a creation.

Pramod: With my experience of working with experiential learning and project based learning kind of situation, when the motivation is external, what I find – and have experienced a lot, and this is the biggest challenge – is that all those projects and experiential learning pedagogies become rituals, or rigid. The learning becomes an accident after three or four years. Have you faced this kind of challenge in your system? How do you overcome it?

Meenu: Actually, we have been doing the same expeditions for the last four or six years, and have continuously worked on getting it ready.

Pramod: So the motivation is still outside. That means you have continuously been working with the school.

Meenu: Outside, meaning…?

Pramod: As external agents, when we work with the system, and we try to set up a pedagogy of experiential learning, the motivation is us. Essentially, the motivation is us, and then the school.

Keerti: I can relate to the context you are working in. But how would this work in a wider context? I am thinking in terms of issues of diversity and equity. Whose experience? Who decides what experience? And particularly, when we are looking at school as not an equal space, when we have children coming in from different social backgrounds and so on within one space, particularly in the context of government schools, I am unable to fathom how something like this would work.

Shashi: My main question is regarding the response to Kanupriya – that is, making the private schools common schools. I looked at it very differently from what perhaps she intended. We are not talking of the private school as it is now – the high fee structure becoming the common school. It is more in terms of the content, the approach to education. Can we make it a more common school that is accessible to a lot of people, especially the kind of children from the Rainbow Homes? Children like that should also have access to this kind of quality that you are talking about rather than just elitist private schools that experiment and do a lot of things. For these schools the hands-on experience is probably important because children from such backgrounds don't actually do hand work. But the slum children that I work with, or Rainbow works with, they have a lot of hands-on street smartness.

And, at the end of the day, what you all are trying to do is achieve the same desire to get marks. You are only using a different methodology, but the idea is the same, that they all score high, because you said they are very successful. So you are also counting your success as children who are scoring high marks.

Avinash: You said there were a certain number of individuals who have been deeply impacted. Can you expand on that a little bit?

Parminder: It was in the context of the 'Courage to Lead and Teach' programme. These were some participants who came for it and who could carry it forward.

S C Behar: What does this imply?

Parminder: It implies that they have started working with this pedagogy inside their classroom and school, trying it in their own context. And I think they have been sharing their learning. There are seven-eight schools where this kind of work is happening. They have started working with real-life experiences as a pedagogic medium.

Otherwise people come and attend, and find the idea good. But when they think of structures, they say that it is not possible to change all those things.

Anjali: I wanted to respond to that whole issue of what model becomes a common school. I enjoyed the presentation and knowing that you were fighting in your own way and this is what has emerged. In that, the nature of the system is very important. A private system is not a collective societal system. Only a public system can be inclusive and developed on the premises and principles of inclusion.

In a private system, whatever the pedagogy, the purpose will ultimately be one against the other – not collective. The whole issue of competition, grading, and the parameters of success itself are different. That is something we need to really engage with, along with pedagogy. It is not about implanting one kind of pedagogy into another system. In Parminder's presentation, the aspects of the system, despite the pedagogy being successful, is what were gleaned out. That is the challenge for the future.

This whole idea of work and education is a good strategy, which we can together collaborate and work on. It is work as a pedagogic medium – not for earning as such, but to give the experience of work, the tiredness of work. One gets tired with mental work also, but the tiredness of physical work is very different. So it is very easy today to say that you are giving in to the children coming through reservation, but they have no merit. If the children who come from non-reserved backgrounds had to work outside to support their education and then study they would perhaps get less than the 80-90 per cent that private school children are now getting.

So I think these two issues could be discussed in further Forums.

Parminder: About outside motivation... We have only worked – intentionally – with Gurgaon schools like Heritage. And there it was not as if we were coming from outside. We really worked as a complete system. Now there are teachers doing it on their own. We haven't been so

intensely involved for the last two years, but it is going well.

The motivation, however, is not from the teacher. It is from the children and the parents. What changes is the management. For them the questions of motivation or demotivation are not related to pedagogy or education, but something else. That is why it is very difficult to manage. There is also the question as to how it will sustain. Things can change.

To answer the question on who decides what experience and the social background… The authenticity and realness of the experience, of the purpose, has its very unique way of engaging children, even if they have diverse backgrounds or learning styles. That's what we have experienced. If it is from their context, it works. Whether it was repairing old bikes or it was working with soil – it was real. It has to be something that we know, and to which there is a purpose.

There was a question about street children or Rainbow school children… I think we can take this pedagogy and education, that system, to them, instead of getting children from there to private schools. That would be a failure, because in private schools, the basic principles are very different.

Meenu: I think Anjali has already answered that. Private schools can never have the system of inclusion. It would be very difficult there. It is driven by one person – whether it is the vision, or the finances.

Parminder: Finances play a huge role. And I don't know how open they will be to the idea. In a private school, you cannot speak up as a matter of right. But in a government school, you can.

Devika: I have two questions. One is linked to your programme for leaders, 'Lead to Change'. You said that you have worked with about 300 leaders and you feel that 50 have been impacted. What you mentioned in terms of impact is that they are carrying forward the experiential education.

My question is, when you are talking about leadership in the context of school leadership, did any framework evolve out of what really is required for school effectiveness? Is it only experiential education that will ultimately make a school effective – as good learning for every child? There cannot be any other measure of an effective school. In these ten years, have you been able to evolve something? Measuring the impact, is there work being done with those seven-eight schools to see what is

effective?

My second question is linked to experiential education itself. You mentioned that Steven Levy has been your mentor, and I can see that you have been inspired by Levy's Wide Path because you have made Gurgaon a safe bike hub and so on. Levy himself actually says that just experiential education and project method is not enough. What he also says is that while children learn a lot through projects – there is no doubt about that, and I think you've given fantastic examples of the expeditions that children have done – you still need to do Mathematics, Language, Social Studies... individually, separately and in a concentrated, domain specific fashion. So he is saying that just experiential education or project method may not ensure good learning. My question there to you is: Have you seen any limitations of experiential learning? Or would you say that everything about experiential learning is good?

S C Behar: I join everybody in saying that it is not only a good presentation, it is also very good work done. I have four different things to say.

One: Learning through work and experiential learning... Though some may consider them as synonymous, what are the differences between the two? Are they the same thing, or are they different?

Second: This idea of expedition is very interesting. However – probably you know what I don't know – Vidya Bhavan's origin is an expedition. But the second part is, an expedition is too expensive and time consuming. Do you have, on the basis of that experience, some models where most of the advantages of an expedition can be obtained, but they are a smaller capsule?

Third: On private schools, you have made an excellent presentation – probably everything that we feel and believe in. Is it possible that this is written evidence based, of course without mentioning the number of specific schools on the basis of which you have got these conclusions? The point I am making is, all those who have been working with schools do know what you have suggested. But it requires some evidence based writing to indicate all the great things that you have talked about regarding the private schools.

Finally, the most fascinating thing for me was when you spoke about Gandhiji's head-hand-heart, the whole model, and tried to work it out for today. I know you can't answer this straightaway, but somehow I got a feeling that gradually it has been truncated to Dr Kolb. I will put it this way: to what extent can I go and see any of the schools where Gandhiji's

basic model of Nai Taleem is being implemented as adjusted and adapted for today? That is a great thing that has to be done. If it has been achieved, very good. If it has not been achieved, it does not matter. If you have tried that, then what are the challenges in that? How do we proceed in that direction? That is my major interest.

Prasoon: I have two questions. You have described your work, but we need some explanations. Why do you call it Nai Taleem? Because Gandhiji's whole idea of experiential learning was in a very different context. He was challenging the hierarchy of society. He said that the idea of society was working with your hands and using your mind. So he was challenging that. Except at Tolstoy Farm, Gandhiji had never worked on a school. You are taking a stand that it is either experiential learning or school learning. You need to explain that. For example, you explained what real-life learning is. My classroom learning is not real-life learning. This is one question.

The second question is, when you worked with Vidya Bhavan, did things work or not? Because Vidya Bhavan School is a 1943 school based on Gandhian ideas. Why did people accept your idea, or not accept your idea?

Avinash: Just to give the context, Prasoon is from Vidya Bhavan that runs a Basic School, as you call it, as well. It has been running for about 43 years.

Radhika: How well does such a programme or curriculum scale up? Because you are talking about large numbers. In large classrooms, how well will such a curriculum work? And what is the response? How receptive are teachers? What one hears is that they are resistant to anything new and see it as workload increasing, new textbooks, activity based learning and all of that. They see it as more work for the teachers. One is the mindset and one is, of course, dealing with large classrooms.

What Keerti raised about work... I was just wondering, how are you going to deal with this problem of defining work? And are we then mainstreaming certain kinds of work like carpentry and weaving, and gardening and so on, and marginalizing work of the marginalized further? Like tanning and so on –there is such stigma attached to such work, it is so caste based. So how do you deal with it in a classroom where there is such a mix, and it is such a diverse classroom where their experiences

are already marginalized?

Lokesh: My question is very similar to what has been asked. I could see the Kolb model of learning. In fact, in the place where I come from – Uttarakhand – there is a school, Lakshmi Ashram, where this concept is followed.

But when you talk about what you call Gandhi's Nai Taleem, I am quite confused, because what I've read is that Gandhiji wanted education to be a means for earning a livelihood. You said work is a kind of pedagogy, whereas Gandhi focused more on sustainability. And in fact, he goes and says that all of society should be able to sustain itself. So I am a little confused.

Parminder: About limitations and effectiveness of experiential learning...

Obviously, when you are taking children out for an experience, the numbers become a limitation – 30-40 students from seven or eight sections becomes difficult. Generally, our experience has been that most private schools are the best examples of assembly line. When you are planning anything there, you have to make sure it can be replicated section-wise and grade-wise. If you have to take them out – say, to the National Museum – how many buses will you need? Logistics becomes a big issue, the basic challenge. Even resources or time become an issue when it comes to experiential learning.

The effectiveness of experiential learning... As far as learning is concerned, it is far, far more effective as compared to textbook learning or whatever you have to do. The limitation is, I think, that we have to keep to small schools, and those open to an education like this. Big schools become very challenging, though we have worked in a school which has eight sections. So it is not that we can't do it. But it takes a lot of energy and a lot of effort to make it happen.

We are not saying that one should only do experiential learning. There has to be structure reforms, curriculum mapping, and then identifying concepts and skills that can be best addressed through real life experiences, and those expeditions can be for a year, or three months, or one month. That is a call we need to take. Yes, we need to focus on Mathematics or Science skills or concepts. We can't do everything from experience – no.

Actually, we can do everything from experience, but time becomes a constraint. The thing is that the number of concepts is too many, so it is

better if we identify a few and design those projects – and maybe we can have skill-building classes to add on. That's what we have also done.

Now, there was a big question about Gandhiji's idea of work and the Kolb experiential learning cycle. The Kolb experiential learning cycle is basically a cycle of how children learn through experience. Now, in which context this learning cycle happens, that makes the difference. So if we can do it in, let's say carpentry, the context is work. The experiential learning cycle is a cycle of how a child goes through learning. But where is the child's learning taking place? The context, and also the authentic purpose and audience – that's where Gandhiji comes in. Gandhiji never talked about this pedagogy, about how a child will go through the learning. That we have taken from the Kolb model. But the context and the whole philosophy comes from Gandhi.

Of the four principles of Gandhi, one was productive work, one was mother tongue, the third was children taking responsibility for their work, and the fourth was, I think, eight years of elementary education, free for all. So this was the basic principle of Nai Taleem. Kolb is a different entity – he just talks about his cycle. So I am not confused. Kolb comes into the pedagogy. Gandhi comes into the basic context and philosophy. That's how we see it.

As far as Vidya Bhavan Basic School is concerned, and what we have learnt from there... We have seen a lot of labs in a lot of schools where we have had workshops – for carpentry, cooking, and electric work. But the workshops were extra-curricular, and the classes were happening differently. There was no link, no using of workshops as a pedagogic medium to teach concepts. And that was the difference we saw at Vidya Bhavan. My learning from there was that we needed to integrate this idea. It was good that they were making some of their own benches and desks. But could we teach Mathematics through those? Because that is the whole idea.

Classroom learning and real-life learning... There can be a lot of activities happening in a classroom. But why can't we apply these to real life? When you are in the real context, a lot of things are addressed. The whole idea of authenticity is taken care of, and children are engaged. We need to see how to now leverage it for teaching concepts and skills. That is the only work that a teacher needs to do there. Everything else is taken care of by the real-life experiences. We thought that through 'Courage to Lead and Teach', we could spread the concept. That was our whole idea of starting it. Every year we do a programme – 30 people come, and one

or two are able to implement it. It's not that the rest don't want to do it, but that structurally it is very difficult to change – to just decide to have a one-and-a-half-hour project class. They just can't visualize that – how to adjust timings, how to do assessment...

Meenu: Receptivity of teachers. That's a challenge. There is a lot of attrition.

Parminder: There is attrition. Every year, you find new people. In three years, you will find that the whole batch is new. But one thing from our experience is that everybody wants to be part of something good. They want to be part of good work. The question is that they are confused about whom to listen to. We say let's do experiential learning, they say marks and parents and management... it's very confusing.

There is one more thing that needs to be done with respect to Nai Taleem. How does one incorporate the whole Nai Taleem model? We want to rework how to bring in the pedagogy and the structural part, and will be able to share it with you all in another month or so.

Showcasing Indian children's literature for educators & parents through book reviews– Goodbooks

RADHIKA MENON and VIDYA MANI have several years of experience in the publishing field. Radhika started Tulika Books in 1996 which focuses on children's books. Vidya is one of the founder members of Bookalore, a Bangalore-based book club that conducts events across the city to bring books and children together in interesting ways. Radhika started the Goodbooks Trust in 2000 to promote Indian children's literature. In 2011, Goodbooks Trust and Wipro partnered together to start Goodbooks.in, a website that exclusively reviews, discusses and critically engages with Indian children's books. Vidya is the managing editor of Goodbooks.in.

Vidya: We all agree that the importance of inculcating the reading habit in children is paramount. It is believed that children who read the most read the best, achieve the most and stay in school the longest. It is also believed that reading is an accrued skill, and one gets better and better at it with experience and exposure. In India, the RTE (Right to Education) Act of 2009 sees the library as an integral part of every school – in fact, has made it mandatory. Why do you think they have done this? I have a few reasons.

The development of reading requires children to engage with more than just their textbooks. The ability to read grows only if children are exposed to a variety of worthwhile reading material. An educator who uses the library well can encourage students to build reading skills by introducing them to books of fiction and non-fiction, thereby encouraging them to become independent learners eventually.

A carefully identified set of books can help develop many faculties in children – imagination, empathy, sensitivity – and a better understanding of the world around them. We all are aware that the more we read, and the more differently we read, the more exposure we have to the world around – not just the immediate world but the world besides. Often, and especially when it comes to children, it is really hard to explain a lot of things that are happening in the world today. Very often, books of fiction and non-fiction do a very good job of trying to put these things in perspective.

So what we want educators to do – that is, teachers or librarians or parents – is to not really create school-time readers but lifetime readers. We don't want children to read only because they have to study. We want them to read because they should read. That's a really, really important skill.

In the light of this understanding, several interesting library initiatives

have sprung up in the last couple of years. Some of you who were talking in the morning today – I think Rainbow Homes – did say how somebody is setting up a library in every centre in the hope that the children go there and are exposed to books. Several library initiatives like Library Educators, Bookworm Trust, Read Alliance, the International Network of Emerging Library Innovators – which is, I think, an initiative of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – have sprung up.

We all agree that a library is vital in a learning environment simply because of how it supports, responds to and enriches the community in which it exists. Educators, typically, in our schools or even at home, are encouraged to help build this bond between children and books, because we all believe that rich books mean richer lives. So, after having understood the importance of introducing them to books comes the challenge of choosing good books. This is one of the most difficult tasks most educators are faced with.

Hundreds of children's books get published in India every year. There are newer publishers coming up virtually every month, bringing out books in English and in different regional languages. But there is so little information available on these books. For instance, growing up, how many of you read Indian writers? Which Indian writer did you read? Narayan. Ruskin Bond, perhaps? Anyone else?

I grew up for a while in Calcutta, so I read Satyajit Ray. But the primary amount of reading we did was perhaps of Western books. One, maybe there were not that many Indian books available then. But today, for educators and teachers, when there are hundreds of excellent children's books coming out in India, how does a teacher or a librarian, or a parent, know of the availability of these books? We can of course say, "Visit a bookstore." But you know that most of our bookstores display mostly Western books. Of course, there are a few Indian ones that get focused on. But primarily, most bookstores, whether they are online or offline, focus on Western books.

So for a teacher, librarian or parent, there is the question of how to select books when so little information is available. How do you pick the good ones? Out of a mass of books available, how do you pick the ones that would work for your audience and for the purpose that you want them to read it?

This is where Goodbooks comes in. Goodbooks was set up in with the aim of filling this gap this exists between books that are available and people who are meant to read them. The idea was to promote reviewing

of Indian children's books in a professional manner which would enhance the understanding of what constitutes good children's books. It is our belief that this will create an awareness about the role of good books in a child's life, and encourage the use of books in schools, libraries and homes. We also hope this will promote the building of libraries in schools and communities.

Our target audience is primarily educators, parents, librarians, writers, illustrators, editors, publishers, research scholars, and students of children's literature and publishing. We exclusively review, discuss and critically engage with books meant for children in the age group of 3-16 years, through good quality reviews and a curated collection of articles. The site, which is a joint initiative of the Goodbooks Trust and Wipro Applying Thought in Schools, hopes to reach out to all stakeholders interested in promoting reading amongst children.

So for a parent or a teacher or librarian faced with dozens of books to read, a good book review website is as essential as maps are for geographers. At Goodbooks, books are classified according to subject categories, genres, themes and age groups, making it easy for you to find the right one for your requirement. We publish about 15-20 evaluative reviews every month, have about six to eight posts up on our blog every month, and highlight reviews from The Book Review, which is a review magazine that was started off in the 70s and has, ever since, been bringing out a yearly issue on children's books. So we also have that archive of book reviews that were published way prior to when Goodbooks was set up.

Indian children's books rarely get the kind of publicity they deserve, either in mainstream media or in social media. So for a site like ours, the aim is to try and fill this gap to ensure that not too many books slip through the cracks. It's just so easy for that to happen, for with the great marketing forces at work kids are mostly aware of Western books that are coming out. So the idea is to ensure that in this space, even Indian children's books – and there are several wonderful ones that come out every year in India – get noticed, and by the people who want to use them.

The site is www.goodbooks.in. Our first objective is to become a unique one-stop site on Indian children's books, whose evaluative and analytical reviews help educators, librarians, parents and other interested stakeholders to find good books for children.

Another is to become a comprehensive resource for locating theme

based and issue based children's books. Presently, in the school scenario or even at home, teachers or parents are looking for books that are relevant to something particular they want children to know about. It could be a festival they are celebrating. Or it could be that there are riots in the city and they want to explain to a young mind why some of these things happen.

We also want to encourage discussion and debate on Indian children's books amongst all its stakeholders. We have been publishing books for many years now, but there are several issues that need to be brought up and there has to be a space to discuss them.

We want to promote the reviewing of children's books in a professional and comprehensive manner. In this age of Tweet reviews and Facebook post reviews, it is important to be able to discuss a book in over 140 characters! There is more to be said about a book! A lot goes into creating those books. So we have reviewers who look at all aspects of a book – theme, age appropriateness, use of language… What about the characters? Is there any stereotyping? The idea is also to create awareness about the role of good books and reading in a child's life. That is what we eventually hope to do.

So how do our reviews help? We know that book reviews are your best choice when it comes to picking appropriate books for your children. What do our reviews typically aim to do? They give the reader a concise summary of the content of the book – we all want to know what is in the book and whether it is relevant or not. They offer a critical assessment of the content, to evaluate it for its appropriateness and for the way it conveys the theme – whether it is using an appropriate storyline or, if it's non-fiction, whether it is using appropriate language to convey what it wants to say. They also make an assessment of various aspects of a book like language, writing style, age appropriateness, illustrations, format and design.

Some of these things are often overlooked. But in a children's book, especially for younger kids, all of this is so important – the role of illustrations, the way the book has been designed, the colours, the way the characters are drawn… They are all such significant aspects of deriving the full reading pleasure out of a book. Our reviews aim to highlight these aspects and tell you specifically whether these are working or not in a book.

We also like to suggest ways in which the books can be used by teachers, librarians and parents. Often we tend to ignore the fact that

we have a wealth of books available in the country that can supplement extremely well what is being taught in the classroom – perhaps far better than what would happen with the textbooks. For instance, I think children from the 3rd Grade onwards have to study Salim Ali, the 'birdman of India'. There are some wonderful children's books available on him, which could supplement what they learn in far more exciting, interesting and attractive ways. So we point out the usefulness of these books at home, in class, or in the library.

We also promote the use of non-textbooks in the classroom and at home. As I just said, we don't want our kids to read just because they need to study well. We want them to read because there is a certain pleasure in reading. And perhaps there is a lot more learning in reading enjoyably than just reading textbooks.

I am going to quickly tell you about some of the features on the site, which I hope you will log into at some point. We have a Home page where, of course, there are the Reviews of the Month, the book review archives and reviewer guidelines – what are the dos and don'ts for reviewing for us, essentially. We have a blog where articles are curated from different sources that are relevant to children's books. A majority of these are of special interest to teachers and librarians.

We have a Goodbooks Recommends segment where we do themed lists of books we like and recommend. We try and make these lists to suit themes for something happening – perhaps it's the time of the Bhopal gas tragedy, or a festival that is coming up, or an event like the Olympics, for instance. So we have a themed book list that suggests books for different age groups, which we put out fortnightly.

We have a directory with a listing of over a thousand children's authors and over 500 illustrators. We also have a publishers' directory listing 88 publishers who have Indian imprints or are Indian publishing houses for children's books.

Goodbooks brings out a fortnightly newsletter which carries pictures from six newly published reviews. It features three articles, one of which would be of special interest to teachers and librarians. And of course it carries the book list on the relevant theme.

We are on social media. None of our reviews will ever fit on social media, of course, but you can follow us on Facebook and Twitter, if you like.

I am going to give you a little indication of some statistics. As of now, we have 454 reviews. They are classified according to age groups – 3-6

years, 6-8 years, 8-13 years and 14+ years. We also have 1,500 or more reviews and articles from The Book Review archives. And from the time that we set up in December 2013 up to December 2014, we have had 4,373 page views and 1,669 users. Last year it saw a larger jump. And I have put down some percentages by which it has gone up.

CURRENT STATISTICS

- Total No of Reviews: 454
- No of Reviews (according to age-group)

3-6 years: 140; 6-8 years: 98; 8-13 years: 188; 14-plus years: 56

- No of The Book Review reviews and articles: 1,527

USER STATISTICS

- December 2014 (one year since the site was launched)
  – Page Views: 4,373
  – Users: 1,669
- December 2015 (two years since the site was launched)
  – Page Views: 7,209
  – Users: 2,943
- This means:
  – 64.8% increase in page views
  – 76.3% increase in users

We also announced The Hindu Young World-Goodbooks Awards this year. The idea behind the awards was to promote excellence in children's writing and illustration in India, to acknowledge innovative publishing trends, and to recognize children's literature as an important and independent field. Most of the time it is usually given short shrift.

The first awards were actually given out at the Hindu Lit for Life Fest in January 2016, in four categories: Best Picture Book (Story), Best Picture Book (Illustrations), Best Book (Fiction) and Best Book (Non-fiction). I think these were the first awards to actually acknowledge the fact that different genres exist in children's publishing. Typically, several awards for children's literature just give out one award for the best children's book, clumping fiction, non-fiction, picture books and everything into one single category. We started off with trying to make it available in four different categories.

I'd like to share some of our present objectives and some of the long-term objectives...

We have the site with reviews and articles, and we've got parents, teachers and librarians coming to look at the site to choose books for their various requirements. We'd like to systematically build the site with monthly reviews, fortnightly newsletters and daily social media feeds.

We want to extend the partnership with The Hindu. We partnered them for the awards, and we want to see if there is a possibility of carrying reviews of children's books in Young World and The Hindu in Schools which are their supplements for children. The Hindu in Schools goes into schools and the Young World is meant for younger readers.

We would like to explore ways in which teachers and librarians can be involved more with us. They know that we exist, they do use our site, but we'd like to bring them on board to engage them more actively through activities or workshops or other interventions.

We would also like to introduce more award categories – one of them for libraries or librarians, or librarian initiatives.

These are our current objectives. In the long term, we would like to design an outreach programme for all the primary stakeholders of our site. We want to work towards including books in different Indian languages, in partnership with other organizations that work with these languages in different parts of the country. We want to promote the role of books and reading in a child's life. And of course, eventually, nothing would make us happier than if we can influence the quality of books being published for children in India today.

We are still quite a young site and there is a lot that can be done to make it one that has a wider and larger user base. And we are hoping that opening up information about it at forums like this will foster more partnerships that will help us reach the content we have to a lot more people.

Q&A

Kanupriya: It's a great site. Congratulations! I have two-three things to talk about. Who is your typical reviewer? And for whom are you reviewing?

Having worked in the government and the NGO space, this is an

experience I had a couple of years ago. The government of West Bengal was thinking of a programme that was to be rolled out in a few thousand schools in the government system – an early grades reading programme. You cannot have an early grades reading programme without books, so then there was this issue of how to select books that would be right for Class 1 and 2. They had to be in Bangla.

Bengalis are really proud of their children's literature. So they felt, "We have so many authors, why do we need to produce new books?" But none of this existing literature is actually for early grades. It is for grades 4, 5 and 6, and older, and we told them that those books wouldn't do. Does the Goodbooks site have something like a framework, or guidelines – that if a book is for age 3, then these should be the characteristics of that book? If you don't, maybe that's something to think about. We found all of that very frustrating and then finally had to put together our own framework to give to the government – we couldn't select books for them because of norms of procurement etc. But if you even have a framework, then it gives them something to match the books against.

The third thing that I am actually coming to is the wider children's media and reviews of that. Books, I think, are today a very small part of that. Children are on apps all the time. There is so much TV programming…

Vidya: There are digital books.

Kanupriya: Yes, there are digital books and movies. You know, the Censor Board said The Jungle Book should be U/A because the 3D is too scary for children. Now, who is going to validate that? Who says it is too scary for children? Children of what age? I don't know if you have heard of Common Sense Media? So something for our Indian content which is like that? Somebody needs to go out there and say Chhota Bheem is completely inappropriate.

Vidya: True. Somebody really needs to go out and say Chhota Bheem is completely inappropriate!

Sudeshna: How do you select books? Are your reviews only in English or in other languages also? And how would you know of publishers who are not the conventional publishers? There are even small groups and NGOs publishing very good books. How would you find out?

Devika: I have been seeing a lot of children's literature from across the world, and was very happy to see the awards you are giving. There is this Rational Science award which the USA has been giving for so long to children's books that deal with science. But they are all stories! – aimed at four-year-olds and five-year-olds through which they learn oviparous amphibians and all of that without it really saying so.

I have two questions. I didn't hear, till the very end, any mention of parents. All the time, you were talking about teachers and librarians, whereas I guess parents would play a very large role in even selecting the books for their children. So how are you going to be looking at that, or why have you not looked at that? That is my first question.

The second one is linked again to probably enhancing the site. I haven't seen it, so I don't know it, but children today need diverse ways of engagement. They need stories, of course. Do you have any plan for the future about live storytelling on the website – that you click on the book and the story is told? An audio comes up, then the characters come up... I have seen such things on websites in the Western world. That is one question, or suggestion.

Children read and they see the echo of that in the merchandise in the market. So they read Angry Birds and they get an Angry Birds cap. Or they read J K Rowling or Roald Dahl and it's all there – on bags, on bottles, everywhere. It echoes and reinforces the idea of the imagination. So is there any such attempt or thought to do the same with Indian books and authors? Are we actually taking it beyond the book and making it a part of the child's life everywhere? That was the second thing.

And the third one... Is there any attempt, or do you have any plan to do some kind of comparison of children's literature – in terms of, why are children getting hooked to a kind of literature of the West? Everybody reads. My eight-year-old grandson is hooked to Roald Dahl and is constantly reading that. So the reading is voracious. Do we have something similar in terms of genre and the theme? And can that be highlighted on the website – that this is exactly the same, but in the Indian context?

Vidya: Our reviewers are typically creative writing professionals, authors, illustrators, and even teachers sometimes – all of who have a set of guidelines by which to review. Actually, the guidelines are up on the site, a long, detailed set that suggests how you review a book like I pointed out in the presentation – putting down aspects of the book that

you need to look for, and to look at them with a more critical eye. This is also the day and age of blogs, and everybody who is anybody is blogging about anything. It seems to have become, in the book world, some sort of "Well, I'm writing this blog and I'm going to promote your book" and "You're writing that blog, so you're going to promote my book".

So the idea – the space – at Goodbooks was to have evaluative reviews, and more comprehensive reviews. They are from people who are steeped in children's literature in some ways and who are aware of Indian children's books. So I think the reviewers themselves try to encompass the whole purpose of that book quite well for not only librarians and educators – and when we say 'educators', we mean parents, teachers, librarians, grandparents – but anyone at all.

However, our reviews are not meant for children. They are reviews of children's books meant clearly for adults. Even the site – there is nothing in it for children although it is all about children's books. I don't think we'll ever get into putting stories up on the site. We are trying to create a repository of information on Indian children's books for parents, teachers and educators.

You asked if we had a framework. In the reviewing guidelines, we have frameworks for reviewing picture books, graphic novels, fiction and non-fiction, which try to encompass and say what children of that age group are looking for – although, personally, age is a very fluid concept. What may be appropriate for me at ten may not be appropriate for somebody else at ten. But generically, we try to say picture books should be like this and so on. I can't say it's a comprehensive framework that is going to help a parent or a teacher to decide whether a book works or not. But if you read the review of that book up on the site, I am quite certain you will be able to get a fairly good idea of what it contains, and whether it is appropriate for your purpose.

Radhika: There are organizations, though, that have guidelines for age levels and so on, like Bookworm Goa. Similarly, Hippocampus in Bangalore and Room to Read – they all follow guidelines. Pratham has them too.

Vidya: NBT (National Book Trust) brought out a document on how to choose good books for children.

We have 1,500 reviews from The Book Review and 500 of our own, which is just a drop in this big, wide ocean. We are hoping we can partner

with organizations and link these resources and have them up on the site. A lot of them are available. I don't think people will say no to putting them up on a site like this.

Radhika: Reviewing other media, like you said Common Sense Media, which means formats other than print... We will. We have to. We can't ignore those.

Vidya: Actually, we are just considering doing that. Pratham's got this initiative called StoryWeaver and they wrote to us asking if we could start to review some of their digital books.

Sometimes we do have reviewers who say that getting the tactile feel of a book is essential. Especially for picture books, we are quite particular that a person gets and touches and feels the book, and then reviews it – takes a look at the print quality and the way it has been illustrated. But yes, digital books are a reality. I think younger generations are going to be reading quite a lot on their devices – on the Kindle or the iPad, or whatever. So we are looking to start off with digital books. But to cast the net so wide as to be able to include movies and TV programmes for children? I think we would like to keep our focus on books.

Radhika: Do we review books from small publishers and NGOs? Yes.

Vidya: We do. Even for the awards, we actually wrote to virtually everyone. I didn't tell you who the winners were. The Best Picture Book Story went to a book from Eklavya. The Best Picture Book Illustration was from Rupa Red Turtle, Best Book (fiction) was from Hachette and Best Book (non-fiction) was from Tulika.

So the thing is, we do write to all publishers. We have written to Kalpavriksha asking them to send us books, and we have written to smaller publishers in various nooks and corners. Some of them send us books regularly. Some of them you need to run behind to try and get any. But any children's literature that comes out, we are happy to review and evaluate on the site.

Any effort to merchandise beyond books, is one of the questions you asked, right? That onus is on the publisher. I do know that some publishers have birthday sets and things that are related to the book.

The comparison between Indian and Western books..... See, the thing is…

Devika: One of the challenges is getting children interested in Indian authors.

Vidya: I think it is all about the way the book is introduced. For instance, if you gave a child a book that had in its story jalebis and laddoos vis-à-vis scones and liquorice, I think an Indian child will gravitate towards jalebis and laddoos, being more familiar with what those mithais are, basically.

The Geronimo Stilton books are so popular with kids, let's say, 8-9-10-year-olds. I am not saying that there are books that are trying to ape that style, but there is, for instance, a book about a 5th Grade boy who can't stand his teacher and his principal. How real is that! Most of us can't stand our teachers and principal, however nice they are. So there are books that echo the Indian experience quite well. We haven't made comparisons, but our reviewers do mention it.

Radhika: That's why the reviews play a role and are so important – so that people can read them and get an idea of what the books are about. And if it reminds them of a Western book, fine; if it doesn't, it's all right. But you still want to introduce it to your child. So that is the purpose of the review.

Nomita: I was talking about books which are more local in context – in local languages. The reason I am saying this is because of the levelling, especially when you have bilingual books. Are they levelled for English, or for the second language that the book is in? – because those two levels don't match physically. That is one issue that we face.

The second thing is, those that have got very high reviews are very exciting books – for example, The Why-Why Girl. Those books are out of publication and very difficult to find. Are they being published again? These are issues that we as teachers and parents would face. How do you deal with those issues? Do you review only books that are in publication, or also those that are not? And how do you then say that we should reach out to these books?

Chandrashekar: Thanks for a nice presentation. I have a lot of questions, but I will ask only one. If I remember correctly, you used the word 'curate' at some point, right? Are you open to curating blogs as well?

Vidya: Curating blogs on books?

Chandrashekar: Not on books, necessarily. I am asking this because you mentioned the Olympics coming up. The Olympics in Brazil is now very closely linked to possibilities of a pandemic – the Zika virus. So if students are learning about the Olympics, it is a fantastic opportunity, a very good context, to study the geography in all of this. To look at where people are coming from, how quickly they are travelling now compared to earlier, and all it will take for any one country is for one person from that country to get bitten by a mosquito in Rio and carry the virus back. You don't even know that the person is infected until after the symptoms show up.

So these kinds of things are like a time bomb, and there is a constant update also going on. In the past few days, they have found that Zika indeed causes microcephaly. So there are new things coming out every day. All of this, simply because I looked at it through the optic of geography and the range of the virus – across latitude and longitude. These things are very interesting. So if you curate something like that, it would also give a different dimension, even if it's not directly books. So are you open to that?

Keerti: I missed some of the presentation, so maybe what I'm asking has already been said. But my question is, how are you addressing a larger audience beyond the urban? And here I have something very specific, because this is from the context of my own work, as we work in rural areas where there isn't a book culture or a reading culture.

What we've struggled with over the last couple of years is how to engage children with a book. How do you do read aloud? What are the conversations you have around a read-aloud session? And what I often do is actually go to YouTube and download a read-aloud picture book in English, and I share that with teachers. I don't find any material of this kind with Indian books – you know, the way you do a read-aloud session, how you introduce the book… I don't know whether this has been looked at, but it would be invaluable for groups like ours.

The second thing is about authors. One of the ways in which we try and engage children is also to look at... For example, Mukand and Riaz by Nina Sabnani. We said, "Someone has written this story. Who is Nina Sabnani? Where is she?" We found that it's not easy to get information on authors. But that is one way of engaging children and I was wondering whether this was an idea that you had thought about.

Maya: This is also sort of linked to what Keerti was asking. I have found that, for some children, the first window into a book could be through an extract that they read as part of the textbook for language. Textbook publishers often use stuff that is archaic, Western, completely outdated and so on. As authors are part of the Goodbooks network, would you be open to providing approval or permission to publishers to use authentic contemporary literature written for Indian kids, for textbooks?

Vidya: This is to address your question on bilingual books. Bilingual books are brought out by different kinds of publishers. And the audiences are not proscribed as urban children or semi-urban children. I know, for instance, that at your own centre, we have curated a collection of books and sent it out to you, essentially, keeping in mind that many of the children are probably going to read the Indian language version first, and then maybe use English as a secondary language.

Our reviews don't try to say whether these books are suitable for 3-6-year-old urban kids or 3-6-year-old rural kids. We don't try and make that sort of distinction. But the complexity of the words used, the level of the language, suitability of the theme... the reviews deal with these. Publishers typically send us books that are English-Hindi. We haven't been receiving others. Even if they bring out multiple language editions, we usually get the English-Hindi ones for review. But if we do get English-Kannada, we will send it to a person who is aware of both languages, can read and understand both. For instance, right from the title... I know there have been reviews where somebody wrote saying that the title sparkles so much more in Hindi and is so tepid in English. So they do point to these things. But I can't say that we have very specific points on whether this would work for a certain kind of audience, or not work for a certain kind of audience.

Nomita: There are adequate books in English for someone to work with. But when you come down to the regional languages, then there is a lot of challenge there, especially for beginner readers.

Vidya: For readers who are just starting out to read, right? One of the objectives is to try and include books in different Indian languages. We need to be able to partner with organizations that have strong editorial skills in those languages. Ultimately these reviews are edited. We are looking to see whether what is being said is appropriate or not. And

sometimes we want to make sure that people, reviewers too, are not bound by any stereotypes, by certain moral dos and don'ts. Because in children's books, you should not have to say that it has a moral at the end and that makes it a better book, or does not make it a better book.

So we need to engage with teams that have strong editorial inputs themselves, because I'm not sure we can do all the judging about a Kannada book or one in a different language. But whenever we review bilingual books, you will find a discussion on the level of language, the competence of the translation, and what age group it would typically work for.

Radhika: I think it is up to the users or the readers of the reviews – teachers and so on – to finally decide whether it works. What might work in a certain kind of school where both languages are at the same level clearly doesn't with another set of students. So that decision finally rests with the user. No review can cover all these points. Finally, it is for the users to decide whether they want to look at those books themselves and if there is something in them which they would like to try and use with the students.

Vidya: If there is a serious problem with a book in terms of some issues or gender stereotyping, it would definitely get pointed out. So at least for starters you know whether it is absolutely appropriate for your own audience, like Radhika says. It's your judgement, eventually.

Radhika: Do we review blogs? I'm not sure we'll get into that...

Vidya: Actually, on the Goodbooks blog, we source links from various blogs that we think would be relevant to books, reading, parents, teachers… We did attempt a second site, but haven't taken it forward completely yet. But we picked some contemporary books and had this little exercise of how this book could be used at home and in the classroom. I remember, there was a book done in epistolary style. Everything was written in letters. And somebody said, "What are the things you can do with that letter-writing kind of exercise?' Try to connect it to other famous epistolary things. Or, for instance, like you said, if there was a sports book and the Olympics were coming up, to try and draw some connections.

We have actually requested for publishers to help us with this kind of content – the efficacy of the book and the multiple ways in which it can

be used. All educators are looking for that kind of stuff. We do have some content. If you have links to blogs that you think would benefit our users in any way, we are happy to look at featuring those links up in our blog.

Radhika: Are reviews going beyond the urban... I think Keerti asked that question. This is an English review site, and obviously for urban readers most of the time. We are trying to, we do want to, have Indian language books. But just one organization can't do all of this. The expertise of various organizations has to be used. And that's what we plan to do – partner with organizations.

But the idea is really to create an ecosystem of books – critically looking at books, talking about crucial issues when you look at books for children, and create that kind of awareness which would then be carried in the other sites. To that extent is what we can do, or work towards. Beyond that, we really have to partner with others and take it forward.

Information about authors is on the site, because we do have a directory, and I think it has email ids. Publishers are the other way to get contacts, though not all publishers may be very forthcoming, I don't know. I don't think it is too difficult – illustrators and writers have their own Facebook pages and so on. Once you get the name, you can find a lot of information, otherwise through the publishers.

Vidya: Many writers and illustrators gladly come on Skype to chat with children, to talk about how they worked on a book. Some of them are excellent storytellers themselves and may be happy to oblige. For every book that gets reviewed, the details of the author and the illustrator are put up, and the publisher's too. You can get in touch with them through the directories on Goodbooks.

Avinash: I think there's a second part to this question as well, Radhika - about if there could be resources that could be used by people directly working with the kids, such as how to do a read-aloud and that kind of thing. I noticed that you had somewhere said that there could be a potential testing about reaching out directly to educators – maybe doing workshops – and it kind of links with that, though it is slightly different as well. What are your thoughts around that?

Vidya: Are you saying to provide guidelines to reading aloud? It veers from our core purpose of reviewing books, of course.

Keerti: I was actually thinking in terms of actual video clippings of workshops you do – making things like that available. I think that would be a great help.

Vidya: I understand. Actually it's a possibility we can consider, because we do interact quite a bit with a lot of these authors. And I'm sure they do sessions in multiple places. So to get a YouTube link and put it up on the site in such a way that parents or teachers can use it, is a possibility. Thank you so much for that suggestion.

Radhika: Indian content for textbooks... Again, I think it has to be the publishers. You will have to write to the publishers because they will finally have to give permission, not the authors. You could write to the authors so they can facilitate it.

Vidya: But they do exist. A textbook that I saw recently had Annual Haircut Day, whose protagonist is called Sringeri Srinivas Rao. And in its full Kannada glory, the story is out. So some textbook publishers are already picking Indian content because there is indeed a wealth of stories and content available for Indian kids which would enhance the learning experience so much more if incorporated in these textbooks. I would not say that a child should not read Charles Dickens. But if there is something that is more culturally relevant, the connect might be a lot stronger.

Evolving context-appropriate educational practices, staying small and spreading wider– Shikshamitra

SUDESHNA SINHA is a psychology graduate of Calcutta University with a special needs education diploma from Mumbai University, she has worked in special and mainstream schools for several years. In 2005, she cofounded Shikshamitra, setup as an experimental school in Kolkata, catering to first generation school goers. Shikshamitra has built a deep and nuanced understanding of child learning and the contextual needs of learners, developed learning programs and models that address these needs, and trained many individuals and organizations in these methods. They have also produced teaching-learning resources, and books and publications on their experiences and insights.

Sudeshna: This is a story – the story of Shikshamitra, or a journey from a small community school to a resource centre. And wherever a story begins, there is a story before that.

So the pre-story is that during 1994-2004, I was instrumental in running a school for migrant labourers in Kolkata. It was a Hindi medium school, which is not so common in Kolkata. And that's where my lab was, where I learnt a lot of things. It was only an after-school, a two-and-a-half-hour programme. We had about ten batches of children who were in Class 10, and we tried all kinds of curricular – pedagogical – experiments.

In 2005, I felt the need to start Shikshamitra. In the previous school, the children would say that two-and-a-half hours were not enough, and there were other observations also:

- 10-12 years of schooling system is not enough to prepare most for a vocation, especially the underprivileged.
- A single fixed curriculum for all children fails to engage the full spectrum of learners. Children – people – learn in different ways.
- The system neglects backgrounds, needs and aptitudes.

These ideas are very common now, but 10-11 years back, it was all still very much a heated question. People were trying things, and already a lot of work had been done. I was lucky to have gone to many such alternative schools and spaces.

The school system at that time was pushing the majority of these children out by Class 10. They are mostly first generation learners, gaining little and losing out on their own survival skills. Somebody was saying here before me, that they have so many skills, they know so much. Also, after a kind of schooling they are very embarrassed to follow their family vocations.

So in 2005, Shikshamitra began its journey, creating a small elementary

school. I call it an elementary school now because really that is what it was, though some children were with us up to Class 8, and later even passed their Class 10 exams. It was for 8-15-year-old first-generation school goers from the slums of Chetla in Kolkata. We were trying the whole idea again, after ten years, with another group of children, and trying to find out what worked, what more was needed. Therefore, we had to experiment with pedagogy.

We went to a Chetla slum, which was perhaps one of the most violent slums of Kolkata. There was a big difference between the group of migrant labourers' children I was working with earlier and this group. It was a registered slum and quite self-sufficient in many ways, and all were Bengalis who had been living there for nearly three generations. That means they owned the place. We were the outsiders.

The idea was to have a school there. Usually, the problem is that you can have great experiments, but they are not documented. So, we thought, why not have a parallel resource centre, so whatever is being taught or tried out gets documented in that Education Resource Centre (ERC). We wanted to collect, process and document useful teaching practices and materials, and then share the relevant learnings through teacher training, We could create documents pertaining to school education, offer educational information and run a library for interested users.

To quickly go through the key features of the school... We had four kinds of extremely diverse children: academically motivated; academically non-inclined, though they were good in many other things; those who didn't like academics; and those with learning difficulties and special needs, many with emotional difficulties. A highly supportive and creative ambience had to be created, and a sense of equity promoted.

The first thing was that the children came. Their mothers mostly worked in people's houses and the fathers were rickshaw-pullers or did menial jobs. The children came, but they came with a sort of distrust towards the teachers. We began with 17 children out of which, strangely, only two were dropouts. The rest were all going to the local government schools but thought this was better so they'd try it out.

So they came in with a lot of distrust, as I said, absolutely no care for the teachers or the school, and a lot of contempt for the institution. Therefore, we had to work at one of the main things we wanted – maintaining equity. And I would say that Shikshamitra did something unusual. We did not have a person to look after the maintenance of the school – the teachers and the students did it. We had a roster with

each one of us cleaning rooms on our own, and cleaning the toilets and bathrooms all together. At the end of one or two months, there would be a review of how each had fared. Even the teachers were not spared.

Next was a very important thing – emphasis on language programmes, in Bengali and English. We found, what I'd always thought, that there was a dearth of necessary Bengali texts. There were lovely texts in Hindi. A lot of people had done work on those for many years. But there was really nothing in Bengali. So these had to be created for teaching. It was the same with English. It's a harsh reality now, and this was many years back, that children who claimed to be in Classes 3 and 4 could not even write their names. So a quick, accelerated reading-writing programme had to be created for them.

A very important thing was that with many children we experimented using films as texts. Many children do not read books but are extremely observant, very vocal, very critical in their thinking, and often the film as a textbook worked wonders. So a lot of work was done through films and audios – both music and theatre.

Writing became a powerful tool for most of the children. The next was the use of graded worksheets because, as I said, there was a whole spectrum of learners with different needs. The worksheets had to be made – if there was one story, different kinds of texts had to be created around it. Art and craft was a key subject. There was hands-on maths, again creating appropriate materials. And cooking became a huge thing, leading to a weekly café.

We used independent learning modes, and experimented with efficient timetables and administration techniques. It was a very small school, and we were only four or five teachers – Shikshamitra has never had more than 35 or 37 children in all these years. We had a large number of sessions on conflict resolution. And, of course, there were assessments.

The challenges of running the school were the costs, violent in-fighting within the community, problems with the police, families – and the brunt would be borne by the school. We acted as a shelter. Often, the children's fathers were not convinced about their coming. Another challenge was finding and retaining suitably innovative teachers. If they were innovative and good they found the salary low. And interestingly, many did not want to work with such children. That's a very, very true and harsh reality, but we faced it.

Our whole energy went into trying to run the school, and the Education Resource Centre was set aside. We found that there were few

library users, and a lack of motivated staff. The school and ERC should not have started together. We needed different people to manage both at the same time.

Our achievements... We had creative, responsible and sensitive learners, both teachers and students. From the time we started in 2005, up to 2007, NGOs and teachers from government schools asked for different kinds of training, especially in language, maths, art, and school management. We were also involved in developing an education programme for children on railway platforms – which I will come to later – and processing and creating materials and books in-house.

It was a dilemma in 2011 when, after long discussions with the students and the community, the school was closed down. It was very sad news for the children who came and for the parents who were with us. With the small number of students and high expenses, it became unviable. There was a scarcity of funds. Also, the RTE (Right to Education) had been enforced by that time, and there was a local drive to send children back to government schools. So in February 2011, we closed the school down. Post closure, the children were enrolled in government schools, taking very proactive roles in monitoring, in starting something new, looking after libraries – mainly, showing leadership qualities.

Whatever experience we had, what we were best at, was the use of expertise, especially with first generation school goers. We had a lot of friends – organizations and individuals – and together we decided to emerge as an Education Resource Centre and spread its work.

The important thing was to retain only those who would be required for this work, and reorienting and preparing them for teachers' training, because they had been teaching in schools and now they had to be in a different role. The new areas of work included providing teachers' training in accelerated reading and writing in Bengali, foundations in English and maths, creative writing in Bengali and English, advanced Bengali, English and maths, art education, and the use of the library as a learning space.

There was a sustained production of teaching-learning materials, with special emphasis on maths, and the publication of books for children and teachers in Bengali and English.

Our work was documented and we decided to do a study with other organizations we had worked with. The main areas of this were: children's language acquisition at home and in school; finding reasons for errors in language teaching in rural West Bengal; a language-impact report on the

use of reading cards; recommendations to deal with errors in language teaching in rural West Bengal; using the Shikshamitra library as an open learning centre; and using the Shikshamitra Learning Programme as a unique approach to the teaching of the mother tongue.

We continue to run a library. It is like a little Shikshamitra school now. Interestingly, when we closed the school, one of our ex-students started a library in the community, saying Shikshamitra can't disappear. It continues there. And later on, the community school was brought back to the Shikshamitra space. Consultations were held on teacher motivation, innovative teaching ideas, sharing and developing learning programmes for organizations, schools, individuals and, very interestingly, parents.

We had government schools – both primary and high – doing language, maths, art and teacher enrichment. There were government homes where teachers and children did basic languages and maths, and there was a library. In the DIETs (District Institute for Education and Trainings), we worked a lot with maths.

We run these support centres in Kolkata and elsewhere in West Bengal, working with the teachers in languages and maths. We also create education programmes and library initiatives for difficult-to-reach children and youth at railway platforms, in beedi-making towns in Murshidabad and in red-light areas of Kolkata, with funding groups like Save the Children and Child International as well as with pre-service teachers at private institutions.

When we were doing all this, there were other initiatives which had nothing to do with education, really – like an English programme for mess workers at IIM Kolkata, a Communication and Readiness for Life programme for stable inmates locked up in the Lumbini government mental hospital. We worked with them, creating a six-month programme for them and visiting them every week. Parents too came for counselling, and many of them came to learn teaching strategies for their own children.

Our contribution has been to create sensible, confident, proactive thinking and sensitive individuals. We have also developed a few motivated teachers in the education system who can work as resource teachers, locally and at the block level, both in government and non-government schools.

Apart from that, we have created a sound basic learning programme in languages and maths, which is fruitful in many situations and has the ability to work in a wide range of situations. People from challenging

areas have come to us again and again. Appropriate material production is becoming a very important area of our work, enabling effective teaching-learning. We have put together a good library programme. Most importantly, we have provided a warm and motivating ambience at Shikshamitra.

We have never been able to work steadily and sustainably with the government system. There were also the challenges of finding and retaining suitable personnel, lack of good networking and publicity, and the need for better distribution of publications. We wanted to remain low-key and small, which is beneficial for bonding and for finances, but is also not always good.

In future, we hope to continue with quality teacher education – most importantly, create more resource people and ensure their enrichment. We have already located interested people, so we will work towards enriching them. We also hope to work with a few like-minded organizations – like a give-and-take, sharing each other's work – and give production units a boost towards self-sufficiency, include more ex-students who are already working in society, and look for general funds.

We have decided to remain small, work in small quantities, maintain the quality of work, and build strong relationships. I think that is the essence of Shikshamitra – to leave deep impacts and share effective practices and documents as much as possible. We have come to believe that it's a process for learning to live better. It is a space where one learns to keep well and to help others keep well too. Shikshamitra has an address. However, it goes beyond that, permeating into the lives of many, and influencing one's choices in life and ways of life.

Shikshamitra is a means towards becoming aware of how much one can be, and knowing exactly what one's limitations are. Thank you.

Q&A

Preeti: Sudeshnaji, how comfortable was it going from a controlled set-up of a school to reaching out as a resource centre? Because then the idea of implementing and using the ideas rest on the people who get trained and, essentially, the control is given away. That is something interesting for us also to learn. How do you go through that process of giving it away to people?

Vasavi: What has been your experience in a deeply politicized environment? How have you negotiated that?

Vijay : Did RTE also contribute to the closure of the school?

Sudeshna: Oh yes.

Reetika: You mentioned compiling the techniques that worked. What was the source of those compilations, and what did you find out?

Lokesh: You have had experience of working with teachers as well as kids. Who are the difficult ones to teach? We often find various reasons why teachers have difficulties. What is your experience?

Sudeshna: The first question was, now that the school is a resource centre, how do we maintain quality? We insist that the training is a two-year programme, with at least five follow-ups. So for two years, we take the responsibility. It's in bits and pieces. In the first phase, we give them time to try it out, go visit, see what is happening with the children and the teachers, and if we find that it's worked well, we move on to the next phase.

Having it for two years helps in consolidating and making it strong, although it doesn't mean that after that it's gone. In two years you can build a very good relationship with the group. That's very important. Sending materials and inviting them to the Centre – many teachers come – is another way of being in touch and consolidating. Without follow-ups, I don't think any training is sustainable. It becomes a one-time effort.

Preeti: A part of the question has been answered very well. The other thing was that when you are running your own school, you have your own systems, you have your own basic running. And then you move from addressing a child to an adult because now you run a resource centre. I wanted to know how you dealt with that.

Sudeshna: It was difficult initially, now it's better. In the training we try to have a group of children. So it's like a classroom. We do a small bit with the children and then carry on with the teachers. Definitely, in the beginning it was quite tough to adjust to the teachers, the adults. But often in a workshop, or whatever the mode is, I find that adults also are

like children.

The next question was about deep impact. The impact is, in a sense, divided into two parts – the adults and the children. The children are our ex-students. Whatever they are doing in their own lives – most are working, many running their own business – they are all around in the community. So what makes the difference is how they are seen in the community, and what role they play. It was the same even when they moved on to another school when our school closed. There was a child who was in Class 6 or 5. She came back to us after two months saying, "You know, there are children who can't read or write, but they don't have any system there in that school. So I went up to my class teacher and said that something has to be done about them." That is the kind of an awareness they have, knowing that something has to be done for these children.

But it was not only about values. Art was very important in our school, and one of the children is budding into a very good artist. He has started having solo exhibitions in one of the galleries. The way he creates his art is very different. He begins by writing a story and from the story his art develops. What I mean is that writing becomes a very important tool. And for many, it's a tool. So when they come back to school, even for get-togethers, the things that they do are art and writing, and then other things.

Observing whatever is going on in communities and reading the newspaper is another thing. What happened in JNU... most children asked us to give them details as to what was going on. So these are, I would say, deep impacts.

We work with government teachers in a big way. In a particular block, out of about altogether 50 teachers in English, Bengali and Maths, about three did very well. Our samples are very small. But each of these three has become the resource person of the block. So again, that's kind of a deep impact.

The next question was about difficulties. Somebody asked me about the slum situation – difficult, political? When we went there, we started with the local club. The secretary of the club was very forthcoming. We put up a huge poster with a cartoon which commented on the system, showing it as a machine. We just put this up there in the slum and requested the club secretary to assemble people there – parents as well as children, because why would parents send children to some strange school that was opening up, which they knew nothing about?

We wanted them to respond to the poster. Of course, the children responded the most, and there was a lot of criticism about what was going on in the system. Later, when we started the school, children started coming in. The area was a favourite haunt of a particular political party, which is in power in West Bengal now and there were situations where two factions clashed. The children would naturally not be safe if their families were from these factions, so they would come into the school. That meant added responsibility, so we had to stay in school at night too while they were there, for about ten days. They would go home, eat and come back. They were boys, who were between 13 and 14, and boys of that age would often be hauled by the police and taken into prison.

When the political fight got over and things cooled down, it all went back to normal. That was a chance for us do an analysis of the situation, as to what went wrong. And from that emerged relevant texts in Bengali and English. So we were using a situation for learning, and lots of critical questions came up.

We have never had any direct clashes with any of the political parties. That is perhaps because of the club secretary. Right now, the elections are going on, and some children came running to us – smaller children, who come to the library now – saying that some of the older children were giving up the jobs they were doing. Why? Because they had been promised government jobs at the end of the elections. That was terrible news for us. Obviously, those children avoid us. And of course they have to pay a price, because they are also campaigning for the party and getting involved in politics.

RTE had a very interesting role. Here again, it's linked. When the RTE came into action, the local councillor and his people took it upon themselves to go and speak to the parents to put the children back into the government schools because those schools were going to look after them completely, and they should not trust these children with any private enterprise. So that was quite important at that time. For one year we were talking to the parents and the children, and finally decided to close down the school. There was also a funds crisis because running a small school with all kinds of inputs becomes quite expensive.

Somebody asked me about compilation. I didn't get you, sorry…

Reetika: In one of your slides, a point was about compiling the teaching practices, or what worked.

Sudeshna: Compilation of different teaching practices, both ours and others' – it's a document. So it can be used by anybody who would like to.

Teachers and kids… is it more difficult with slum children – that's what you asked, right? It's a very good question. The difficulties are more with the teachers. There are more organizations working with slum children, or let's say, underprivileged children – there are more articles written about it. Even ten or 15 years back, we wouldn't have had so much exposure, or even information. It is perhaps a kind of a reflection of society.

Let me try to explain it this way… When we were small, even those a little older than us, we played with slum kids. There was no problem. But now, there are very few people like that. There is a lot more distance – the difference is starker. Perhaps the middle to upper middle class has also become upwardly mobile. So there is more money, life has become better, and chances of mixing with each other are fewer.

Parks were a great area where things would happen. People would play together and have fights too. But I don't think anybody plays in parks any more – more so with slum/underprivileged children. They are taught not to.

When teachers came from so-called elite backgrounds, there was a lot of love and care, and they were very well meaning. But when it is day-to-day work with the children, that's where it starts showing. We used to have a Saraswati Puja in our school. It was the second year, I think, and the children said that they would get the utensils to cook all the khichdi – the bhog, or prasad, that we normally have. Many teachers said no to that because they felt the utensils may not be that clean.

We have had very good teachers from big schools coming to us, but they were very uncomfortable dealing with children in the class. If they were academically fine, there was no problem. If they were non-academic, and also created trouble, and not given the right kind of pedagogic material, there was a big problem. It would show immediately. And often you could see the children and the teachers drifting apart – it was no more a happy situation.

A wonderful teacher might also find that the pedagogy that worked very well in a regular school didn't work with these children. So it is not the question of 'why' – rather, if they are not reading enough, what do I teach? That's where the hands-on work helps. Instead of explaining a topo-sheet, if you make a topo-map with your hands, looking at the topo-sheet maybe, it makes a big difference for the children.

That's why another thing I said was about creating simple texts. It is not just about giving a geography book or a history book, but about creating. Local history books had to be created. It is tough. If you really want to do a good job, running a school like that is quite a tough job. No wonder we could not document it well. I think those are the issues.

Shashi Rao: Given what you just said, how does the Resource Centre prepare teachers to go and teach in slums? How do you help teachers deal with this?

Sudeshna: Right now, the Resource Centre comprises teachers who have worked positively, or who could really work with those children in the school. So they have taken on a new role of teaching the teachers. The same techniques or sensitization programmes that we did with teachers who came into the school, we try with the government teachers now, and even teachers from non-governmental organizations.

A few things come together. When you ask a child who says, "I love English or Maths", "Why do you love it?" the response is, "Because I can." This "I can" is a very important thing. When I say "I can", it means I find it easy, or whatever. It's the same with teaching. If techniques or materials help her teach better, the teacher also says "I can" and will teach better. So it's not just about teaching. It is associated with other things in the teaching – what you do. That's why I said material is becoming a very big area.

We had a very good maths teacher who has joined Azim Premji University. She was a great inspiration. We inspired each other – not only in maths. She was a thinking person. That's the kind of people you need. And we very much acknowledge Pratham, Professor Jalaluddin, Jodo Gyan – we have based a lot of things on their materials or concepts.

Prasoon: What is more important – the teacher or the material? Where will you invest, given that you have travelled from being an organization that had its own teachers and own materials to become an organization in which now you don't own teachers, you train them?

My second question is, what was your idea of training teachers when you were implementing, and what is your idea of training a teacher when you don't own your teachers?

What are the fundamental questions that you would like to deal with when you are changing? For example, in Vidya Bhavan, for us it

is important, as a part of our training, to help teachers get out of the mindset through which they have learnt. They have learnt through rote learning. So, one of the objectives of our training is to get teachers out of that mindset. So what are the two or three fundamental things which you are looking for when you are training teachers?

Sudeshna: I completely agree with you. Teacher training is not just teaching techniques and what materials to use. It is much more. It is about how you orient the teachers and what you are doing. If it's teaching Bengali or Hindi or whatever, it is not just about the programme. When you are teaching how to convey or teach something, obviously there are different things to look at.

If your training is very strong – meaning, not just the methods and the techniques, but how you are doing it, how you are offering it to the teacher – that kind of sets them thinking and makes them see the difference as to how they deal with the students and the material and the teaching. So that's definitely an important way of training teachers.

The teacher is very important. That's why I said it's not just a three-day teacher training. We go for follow-ups meetings, and teachers are free to call or visit us – the interaction makes it very clear what the problems are. One round of training cannot change a teacher. It's a kind of a sensitization, strengthening them and giving them equipment for their work.

If a classroom has 50 children and different kinds of learners, you have got to have five different kinds materials. It could be just addition, if it is maths, but they could be doing it in different ways and using different materials. It helps. That is precisely what we try to do in Shikshamitra – to see who, or which group, is responding to which material.

Avinash: When you started, you were obviously running a school, and there were different subjects that you had to deal with and so on. As an Education Resource Centre, have you chosen to specialize in a few areas?

Sudeshna: Yes, because we thought we did that the best.

Avinash: The reason I am also asking is because if you look at different civil society organizations, some seem to start with a specific focus in certain subject areas. Some start more generically. And then some of them tend to specialize in a particular area. What has your experience

been? Has this specialization helped you some way, you feel?

Sudeshna: It was like stock taking. What did we do well? Or, what has been very effective for the children and also for the teachers? Then we matched the two – we do this well and those we taught are also doing it well. We tested it out a number of times and it worked. We also decided that there were three important subjects – English, Bengali and Maths. And that's also the demand.

S C Behar: I think you have indicated that you were motivated, and these were the areas. After that, you were talking about the teachers getting motivated through the training.

Sudeshna: Yes

S C Behar: I just wanted to know the methods, strategies and techniques of motivating the teachers.

Sudeshna: First of all, I think it's a good question, and not a simple question. When it comes to teacher motivation, there are different kinds of things. One is a standard set-up, like a government school, where children come for certain hours, are taught and go home. There are also set-ups where we have been invited. It could be really big schools or small, private or non-government enterprises where we hold sessions of what we call motivating teachers. The focus is not on a particular subject, but motivating the teachers in general.

It's like motivating any learner. We have a number of sessions, including writing, film viewing and discussion. Of course there are certain techniques, and a session where the teachers talk about problems in the classroom, and we take them up together or separately and deal with them. So that's a very pure two-day teacher motivation programme which sometimes we are asked to do. But it ends there. Usually, we don't do it a number of time. If we do, it is after some months, not in continuation.

The other part is literally teaching teachers to teach in the classroom, and seeing what the problems are. That is a set of processes, a system. First, we go and visit the place and do an assessment of the children and teachers together. It is a one-day or two-day exercise. Each group is very different. Say, for example, it's for a group of platform children. Working with them is very different, and you have to cull out a programme which

has both teacher programmes as well as other things to motivate them. So you create a whole programme for them. The teachers have to be taught and one of us has to be there with the sessions for two-three days to see if it works. So, as I said, each group requires different techniques.

Vibha: Can you name the organizations or the types of projects that have benefited from your resource organization? You have been working for the last three-four years. So I am curious to know whether you all work only in West Bengal or across the country too.

Sudeshna: We are mainly in West Bengal. But our materials have travelled all over India.

Vibha: So you are open to supporting organizations anywhere else in the country, if we refer them to you?

Sudeshna: Obviously the Bengali part of it won't work, unless it's with migrants, of which there are a lot now in other cities, for whom there are schools – like, Nomita, you have – or centres. There are people who keep telling us to create a programme for how to teach this kind of children.

Vibha: So you provide the materials as well as the basic principles of how teachers should work with railway children versus street and all that.

Shaheen: Just to connect, what you have done with Bengali can also be done with Kannada or any other language?

Sudeshna: Good organizations have done the same work in Kannada.

Anjali: When you were responding to the question on motivation, I was wondering if the metaphor of lock and key would work, in the sense that people have certain motivations which are kind of locked inside. Yet you can't have one key, one master key.

Sudeshna: That's precisely it. Maybe I haven't been able to vocalize it that way.

Anjali: But at the same time, some people do make master keys.

Sudeshna: We don't have a master key, I'm sorry.

Anjali: Should we strive to make one for motivation? I don't know.

Sudeshna: Like I said, we are a small team and would prefer to stay small. But we could definitely collaborate with people who can help in working with documentation or processes. That would be wonderful.

Geeta: I want to add on to a question that was asked about investing in teachers or teaching aids, what you would prefer. I feel that teachers are resources in themselves. A good teacher can stand there and motivate children to do things without having a single thing in her hands. I have seen that happen in my interactions with a few good teachers, and thankfully was blessed enough to have some myself.

I have worked with ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) teachers when I conducted teacher training. Those were government organizations dealing with learning centres for children of two-and-a-half to six years of age, in the homes of slum children, where housewives actually run the centres. They have minimum education with zero language skills, and the classes are supposed to run in English. Those teachers were tough nuts to crack because they were working for the government, and the government doesn't pay you well. The government asks you to do a lot of things that you did not know when you signed the contract. The government makes you do election duties and many more things that you did not know were going to be a package deal. So the teachers were, of course, demotivated.

I think what helped us get through to these teachers was basically to give them a listening ear – to understand, and to tell them, to make them believe, that it was possible even with minimum resources. You don't need to have money to build a good centre. You need to have the motivation and a drive to drive those teachers. You need to have the will to make learning happen. You need to understand the child and follow the child. That's the key principle. If you know what the child requires, you can use your senses, you can use home remedies, and you can work towards the child.

So I guess that's what worked with me when I worked with these ICDS teachers, just to drive them. They had no equipment – zero. We started working with collecting bottle caps and trying to do counting through that. We used cards to try to do numbers, and chalks to do counting with.

A key element here is also the parents, because you do all this for the children and the parents come and question your intentions. We worked with slum children's parents, and they would come and say: "We are not sure whether what you are doing is right. Are you really working towards our children's benefit? See, we don't know English. We can't teach them, so we are sending them to you." And my answer to that would be that it's a two-way process. They can't send their child to me and tell me that I am responsible for their education totally, because the child is with them for longer hours than with me. What I expect from them is to do simple things that their grandmother must have told them, like I grew up listening to stories from my grandmother. They need not be from storybooks. They were stories, they were interactions, they were moral stories – the Mahabharata, Ramayana... So they could do that.

I remember I grew up with, you know, those stones you throw up in the air and catch them. That's eye-hand coordination. I tell them they could do that with their child. You also have those sticks that you throw, and you try picking up one without disturbing the other sticks – that's another game. That's again eye-hand coordination, and builds concentration in a child. If you play just these simple games with the child, you are doing so much for them. You are building skills in them which are very important.

Sudeshna: I have just one thing to add. Not at that level of ICDS, but at certain levels, especially when children have grown up and have, what we call, 'missed the bus', efficient and good methods and materials really help them to learn quicker.

Bala: This is triggered by what Anjali was saying in terms of developing a master key, and should we attempt to do it. I don't know if we should. Is there one? I don't know. But I'm sure – at least, believe – that there may be some general principles which can be gleaned from the collective wisdom of groups like this, which can show us some direction to take when it comes to something as difficult as motivation.

For instance, one of the things we do at EZVidya is simply constantly reminding and alluding to the larger purpose of the role the teacher plays in society. Sometimes the purpose is served. But now, how effective is it? Is a teacher going to be really motivated by it? We can't measure it, but that's also a part of the domain that we are working in. A large part of what we do – or are attempting to do – can't be measured. And the best

thing we can do is to take the step forward, I suppose.

Keerti: I can't help adding this in. It's a tough one, teacher motivation, but if we are able to understand children and make success achievable, I think that's the biggest motivation. I mean, they say there is no motivator like success. And in my limited experience, I find that it's a question of understanding children, being able to figure out what is going to make them succeed. And once teachers find kids succeeding, I think there's no bigger motivator. Maybe that's the master key.

Sudeshna: Just in case anybody is interested in our documentation... With our older group of children, we did a reading session of The Post Office (Daak Ghor) by Tagore. It was a completely different experience and different strategy. That was documented and has been brought out by Vishwa Bharati University – but it is in Bengali, sorry.

Ideas and Initiatives in Education

Partner Organizations and Individuals share specific ideas and initiatives that they are working on, ranging from nature education, alternative schools, making films in education to working on a framework for social and emotional learning.

Loving Nature: Bringing children and adults closer to the natural world– Nature Conservation Foundation

SUHEL QUADER is Director and Scientist at the Nature Conservation Foundation and is head of citizen science programmes at the National Centre for Biological Sciences. He is interested in a variety of themes in ecology, including animal behaviour, evolutionary ecology, public participation in ecological research, and quantitative ecology. His other interest is in Citizen Science, or what is often now called Public Participation in Scientific Research. The idea here is that the world is large and complex and is changing rapidly, and to better understand the world everyone needs to work together regardless of our background or formal training.

Suhel: There is a reason to not have a PowerPoint presentation, which is that when I don't have one I tend to feel a bit lost. And when you are lost, there is a higher probability that something interesting and surprising can happen. So let's hope something surprising happens here – that I get completely lost!

In comparison to the kinds of presentations so far, what I do seems very trivial and I embrace that. I don't apologize for that. But interestingly, it has allowed me to decide not to talk very much about what we do – instead, just to have a series of musings and meditations with you on the theme of nature education.

One constraint I have while talking to a group of people who work in education reform is that we don't necessarily share the same vocabulary and the same frame. If this were a group of nature educators, then I could jump right into the subject matter, just like you can jump into yours because you know that everybody shares a common set of approaches and assumptions.

So what I have decided to do is to step back and look at the enterprise of nature education a little more broadly, so that we can actually discuss the basis on which this is happening. So a large part of what I'll talk about today is about just setting the stage. And then I hope, in discussion, we can also talk about some specifics of how different people and we are doing things.

There is a fundamental question which we ourselves often don't address as nature educators: Why should we care about nature? This is a straightforward question with a not-so-straightforward answer. Different people have different answers. Many people don't actually have an answer or have not thought through an answer.

So, why care about nature? On one end of the spectrum is the idea that we should because it provides us goods and services that are essential to

our material wellbeing. We need clean air, drinking water, fertile soils… Without these, human civilization is essentially toast, it can't exist.

My colleague Shankar Raman has said – and written – that these services that nature provides is really what we should call infrastructure. Infrastructure is not roads and buildings and all that. That's what we build on top of the actual natural infrastructure, because that's what underlies everything.

Apart from air, water and soil, there are a number of other things. Trees give us wood, forest plants give us medicines – new medicines to combat new diseases. If bees and other pollinators disappeared overnight, then half our agricultural crops – our food crops – would disappear as well. There are a number of goods and services that nature provides. Nowadays we call these ecosystem services, and people try and put an economic value on them and so on.

Maybe we can all agree – if you don't, we will talk about it – that for the goods and services that nature provides, we need to be doing things as routinely as we provide health and education to our people, regulate drunken driving or adulteration of foodstuffs… in the same category. Our survival as a society, our material wellbeing as individual people, depends on nature. This I think is rather uncontroversial. That is one end of the spectrum.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are people who say that this may well be, but the material wellbeing that nature provides for us is not the sole value we should have. Or the value that we put on nature should not be calculated solely based on that. The idea here is that we are actually creatures of nature. We are not apart from nature. To talk about humans and nature as separate misses a very important, integral point.

Some symptoms of how closely we think about and interact with nature come from an exploration of art and culture. If we think of literature and poetry, the visual arts, sculpture and stories, they are all suffused with imagery, with allegory, with metaphor that is drawn from plants and animals, rivers and mountains. If you did a thought experiment and imagined that all our art and culture was overnight purged of all reference to nature, I think you will agree that it will be a much, much poorer society to live in. We wouldn't have the metaphors of strength and cunning and love and devotion that animals provide us. We wouldn't have all kinds of other ideas and imaginations that draw from various natural beings and objects. So the notion here is that nature is part of our humanity. As nature diminishes, we diminish. Our capacity

for imagination and metaphor and love diminish.

I want to focus not on the material wellbeing and the services that nature provides, but on this second aspect. Especially in the context of children's education, I like to focus on this for two reasons. One is that I am slightly uncomfortable with the idea of viewing children as agents of social change – of educating children in order that they will do something for the environment, either now or later in their lives.

The second reason is that I am aware of a great hypocrisy among urban middle-class English-educated people telling rural and marginalized and deprived communities that they should use fewer resources and so on, because the earth is hurting. And for that reason, I like to use the term 'nature education' rather than 'conservation education' or 'environmental education'. But this is, of course, a matter of opinion.

Does anybody have anything to add/say at this point? Or shall we have a quiz?

Devika: I agree with you about the metaphor and the allegories and analogies from nature. Children's stories are also full of them, not just the classic poems, or odes and elegies. But I think that's also changing in children's literature. In modern literature, if you see, it is more to do with what they see in the life around them. So that's the other worrisome aspect.

Suhel: I agree. Yesterday, I remember there was a discussion about how stories need to be drawn from children's experience so that they can make a connection. I'd like to suggest also the opposite – that we should have stories that are far removed from a child's experience because that's what allows them to imagine other un-experienced worlds and un-experienced societies, un-experienced emotions, for example. And I think nature can provide that.

Chandrashekar: I am glad you said you were only slightly uncomfortable with the idea of children as agents of change. If you admit that the human impact on the environment has been so great, to an extent where now we are talking about the anthropocene as the human age on earth, isn't it important that we actually do engage with children and say these are the mistakes that others may have made? – including us, so we are not critical about it. So children are sensitized not only to the impacts they could have, but also to be very aware of their impacts, and therefore to

then say that if this is going to be my impact, I should be conscious of how I interact with the environment?

In that sense, while you may be a little uncomfortable with this – I think I know where you are coming from, but I'm not sure – isn't it important that we also actually equip our children to think critically about their role in the environment?

Suhel: I think the question is when to equip them. I am uncomfortable with the idea not because I am uncomfortable with the notion of burdening children with problems that they have not, but we have created. My eight-year-old daughter, some months ago, couldn't sleep one night and was crying uncontrollably. Finally, when my wife figured out why, she said that she was worried about the ozone hole. I don't think children should worry about climate change and the ozone hole and all that. I'll come to that a bit later – what I think we should be talking to children about.

Let's try and use our imaginations a little bit. Imagine you are a black-winged kite, a bird about this big. It's got a white belly, steel-grey head and back, and black wings. It has a hooked beak – it's a kite, a bird of prey – and it's got fierce red eyes. So you are a black-winged kite that's hovering above a grassland in Gujarat, maybe about 500 metres up. Black-winged kites have long, pointed wings. And what they can do with them is hold their wings at an angle such that if there is sufficient breeze, they can stay pretty much stationary – absolutely rock-steady. The reason they do that of course is that they are hunting lizards and mice and they need to look. They have very acute vision and they need to be able to see them.

So this black-winged kite is hovering absolutely stationary up above the grassland. Down below is kilometres and kilometres of waving golden grass. There is a small herd of antelope – there's something called black-buck antelope, native to India. There are two fawns playing with each other, and their mother is worriedly looking around because there are two wolves underneath a tree that are watching this entire scene very carefully.

As the kite sees all this, it also suddenly notices the tell-tale urine trail of a mouse. It can tell, because mouse urine reflects ultraviolet light. We cannot see ultraviolet, birds can. It's a tell-tale sign that there is a mouse burrow or something over there. And down under the grass, there is a beetle rolling a ball of dung down, down, down the hill – trying to find a place where it can store the dung and lay its eggs.

Rather than this kite coming down to hunt the mouse, let's imagine this is a slightly superhuman kite, which can go as high as, let's say, eight kilometres, which is about the limit at which birds can be. At that point, you can clearly see the curvature of the horizon of the earth. And let's say it goes even higher. It goes – you have to use your imagination – halfway to the moon.

And let's imagine that time speeds up, and we have this flickering day and night – one important cycle the earth goes through. But we also have the seasons. Now the kite can look at the entire globe. It can see, in the northern summer, the northern hemisphere pulses green. And as it becomes winter, it pulses brown and white. It pulses green and brown-and-white, green, brown, green, brown… as the earth revolves around the sun and the seasons pulsate. This is the pulse of the earth.

Imagine that this kite now looks away from the earth, into outer space. And it sees billions and trillions of stars and planets, and there's nothing there. The only life that we know is on this planet – on this small, innocuous planet. Imagine that on this planet, there are a trillion trees. And these trillion trees are photosynthesizing, they are breathing. Beneath the trees, on the ground, there are a hundred trillion insects and some beetles. Inside the ground – in the earth, in the water – there are a trillion trillion microbes, bacteria and so on. All of these are breathing. They are making food or eating food. They are reproducing, dying, decomposing, springing anew. All of this has been happening for, let's say, three billion years. And if those three billion years were compressed into a space of a day – 24 hours – humans have been around for three minutes of the day. Modern humans – homo sapiens – have been around for three seconds of the day.

I don't pretend to know what you feel when you think about this, if you've followed me and used your imagination. But to me, I feel humbled, I feel awed, I feel I want to know more about this, I want to engage with this… I feel privileged to live on an earth with such endless delight and surprises and diversity. I want to be able to show my daughters all this. I want them to be able to live in such a world where they can delight in this diversity and this wonder. I feel sad, and I am sometimes angry, that I know that every passing minute and hour and day, this diversity, this richness, is decreasing.

So in the context of school and children's education, what can we do? I think that for children – and we can argue at what age childhood stops, but I think we need to reconnect children with nature. We need to show

them how the joy and the wonder, and the curiosity and the awe can be felt when you are out and thinking about these things, experiencing these things. That's the kind of approach that I think is needed. Maybe we, at college level and as adults, talk about the gloom and doom. But at this point, I think children should love nature, learn to love nature.

I will talk briefly about what we do at the Nature Conservation Foundation. But at this point, does anybody want to add something? Did I miss something? Is there another perspective that you would like to bring in?

Arun: Because we live in rural Kerala, I have been noticing this – that we take a lot of effort to create complex activities and toys and things for children. Nature is infinitely complicated, right? It is infinitely colourful, infinitely interesting. So I think it is grossly under-utilized in this whole educational debate because we are trying to mimic things and create. I know somebody who is creating a laboratory to keep children interested. Just go outside! That's what I'm saying.

Suhel: Can I add to that? Actually, there is some work in the US and the UK that seems to show that if you take a group of children out – especially if you repeatedly take them out on nature walks and immerse them in nature – this has an unexpected positive effect on their academic work in unrelated fields. I don't know what to make of the particular evidence that is presented in these studies. But it's not all that surprising to me that when you get children engaged and excited about some complex system that's out there, they start to see patterns, learn how to draw different kinds of metaphors. It is not surprising to me that this translates into the rest of their lives, including their academic lives. In fact, the discussion about experiential learning and expeditional learning, I think, is similar to this.

I'm not focusing on doing this as an instrument to increasing the academic performance. But it seems like there might be a commonality.

Anjali: What does one do about the distance from nature that modern urban lifestyle has in itself created – the life choices one makes? If one looks at tribal or agricultural lifestyle, like an animal, the struggle for food and life is integrated with nature. And within that is the wonder. You don't have to create some association with nature. Whereas for the urban child, even if you take them out of the laboratory, it's a one-off

kind of thing. So, for example, could inspiration be taken from initiatives like in Japan, where there is this forest kindergarten where children are allowed to struggle? They are not protected by an adult all the time. If it rains, they struggle through the rain like a tribal child struggles here. That is integral to what you say – that man is part of nature and not out of it. Can one start in that direction? People do. There are exceptional people, who keep on going into more interior regions for their life modes and so on. But can that become a larger movement as such – not just for children but for all of us?

Suhel: I think that is the primary question that they have to struggle with. There is also research – mainly in the West, not in India – asking what the life experiences are that people have had. Or rather, they have interviewed people who have made their careers out of something in the environment, or who have very strong feelings or behaviour for the environment. And there are a couple of things that emerged very strongly about what they really experience. The most important factor appears to be the experience of a child having spent time in the 'wilderness'. It could even be a path that is not manicured. Having unsupervised play in a natural environment seems to be extremely important. So the child explores, tortures dragonflies… You know how people do this. I've never done it but a lot of my colleagues who are in wildlife and nature, when they were kids, they used to do all these cruel things – to insects, at least, not to humans.

The second, which is also very difficult to provide, is to have an adult who acts as a kind of mentor, who is passionate about the subject, who you can go to for advice and information, and who maybe takes you around sometimes. These two things seem to be very important. How to provide them, of course, is the big question.

I will say a little bit about how some of the work we have done in our organization has tried to do this. But again, to do this at scale is always the big question. Many of us work very effectively in small scales, but large scales are always a problem.

Simantini: To add to the exercise that you just tried… The issue of time is something that needs to be taken very seriously in this context because the enormity of time itself is extremely humbling. The accidents which the knowledge systems today have cracked, we understand what it is, that accidents have happened in the story of life on earth. There also needs to

be that kind of fascination. Those connections need to be discussed with children. They need to be revealed to children. Whether with a little bit of didacticism or in story form or whatever… there can be a variety of ways. But one thing is that that the exposure needs to be a planned exposure, it needs to be consistent, and it needs to be something very concrete. Time is one of the issues that needs to be repeatedly made concrete, because without that they will not understand what it's taken.

Another thing is that the same child is also bombarded with many other things connected with nature in the planned curriculum that the child is going through. So you need to have another tangent, another axis that will make more concrete meaning out of those things which are completely meaningless and abstract for the child.

So what you are saying about age group, there is already a pre-decided kind of bombardment by other planned curricula, so you don't have to fall in that trap. But at the same time, you need to understand that that information is also available to the child. The child has to struggle with it. And so you've got to kind of work within what is available in the child's world, which is not only nature – the cognitive world.

Suhel: Yes, so that's the cognitive world. I've been thinking about this as actually a half-emotional and half-cognitive world. And maybe one of the difficulties that people like me have working with curriculum, within the school structure, is…

Simantini: When you use the word 'cognitive', it doesn't mean devoid of 'affective'? When you understand something, you also generate feelings in relation to that.

Suhel: Yes, sure. They are connected. But to my understanding, the curriculum, as it stands now, has two problems. One is that it is very much focused on problems and solutions, which I have a bit of an issue with. And it focuses on this cognitive, this understanding aspect, rather than the feeling aspect.

We think we are raising children to be citizens, not just technicians, not just cogs in a machine, so where do those values come from? Does the school have an influence? How can we influence without indoctrinating? These are the questions. I don't have the answers to these things.

As a consequence, we have mostly worked outside the formal structure. There is an exception. My colleague Pranav Trivedi has worked

for ten years now in the Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh, and we have another project going on. So I should say that the Nature Conservation Foundation – which has the acronym NCF, which confuses everybody (because it could also be National Curriculum Framework!), so I'll just say 'my organization' – is primarily a research organization. We do some conservation work and there is also an educational component. This year, we are 20 years old.

So for the last ten years, my colleague Pranav has been working over there, and he has managed to work with the formal school system – the government schooling system – to implement a nature education project year after year. It's built into the curriculum now. The keystone of that is a very, very life-changing experience. Spiti, if you don't know, is in the trans-Himalaya region, across the crest of the Himalayas, on the Tibetan plateau. It is very dry and very cold. These children trek up 500 metres higher, to the next big valley, where they pitch tents and camp for three days. This would be the first time that they have actually pitched a tent and stayed in a camp away from their homes. A large part of what Pranav does there is just immersion into nature. The children sit by themselves and think about something. They choose a spot along the river and they think about something. There's nobody else there except the children. They sleep, maybe. They go to sleep under the sun, in summer, and they come back.

There are various other things, of course, but they come back with – from what they write, at least – some very profound changes in their lives. That is just a single experience. Of course, what we would like to do is do multiple experiences, and he's been able to do that there. Again, it's about the scale, and I don't have the answer to that.

In the rest of what we do, the main theme, is to 'go outdoors'. You will not learn to love nature, you will not connect with nature, if you are inside. So when we make our material and our games and so on, we make most of them such that they are meant to be done outside – alone by the children, or with the teacher, or parent and so on.

Actually, I am not going to say much about what we do. There's a poster that has all of that, if you are interested. But since all of you are working in education, rather than say all that we do, this is an opportunity to get ideas from you – from people who work day in and day out with children, understand their pedagogy and development and so on. How can we do this better, on a small scale, as well as implemented on a larger scale? Does scale mean it has to be done within the curriculum? If so, is it ever

going to be possible? And if it is going to be done outside the curriculum, is there a way to do it? Those kinds of things.

Keerti: I think it's also to do with experiencing diversity – giving children that first-hand experience of diversity.

Suhel: Diversity of what?

Keerti: Of life-forms, of being, and the fact that we experience nature differently. So there are different ways of engaging, there isn't just that one way. I think that's rich, because in the curriculum we are bringing children much more into convergence. So that, for me, is an important element.

Suhel: Yes. And I think again that diversity – not just of life forms, but how they conduct their lives, how they transact… I will give you an example about two kinds of beings. One is the ants and bees that we were talking about this morning on our nature walk, and how the colony essentially is females – the entire million-strong termite colony or the few-hundred ant colony. These are all female workers and soldiers. They play multiple roles. And little girls – I find this very fascinating – love it when you see an ant and you refer to the ant as 'her' and 'she'! "She bit me" and "She's a big, strong soldier ant with big jaws. I'd better be scared of her and keep her at arm's length – respect her."

Or I can give you another example. This is unfortunate, but most mammal and bird groups are in some sense male dominated. Males are usually bigger than females. In polygamous groups of birds and mammals, it is usually one male and multiple females. But there are very key exceptions. There are at least birds where a single female has multiple husbands. And you highlight this. So it is not just the diversity of beings. It is the diversity of behaviour, the diversity of ways of making a living. Fortunately or unfortunately, we seem to try and draw lessons from the natural world – which maybe we shouldn't.

It used to be thought that most birds are monogamous, and the Victorians took this as a great virtue and said we should be more like birds – look, there's a male and a female and they cooperate, there's all harmony in building a nest and raising their young and so on. We now know that the natural world is full of disharmony. It's not just monogamy, not just polygyny with one male and multiple females, we also have

polyandry. By the way, there is also polyandry in human societies – which is perhaps something we should point out a little more, rather than think of the current norms as the norm. So the diversity could be in a variety of ways.

Vibha: My question is on technology and its role – pros and cons – in nature and working with children. You were talking about the experiential, taking the children out. When I was younger, we used to watch Animal Planet on TV. It helped to learn things, but it also brought distance. Today it is YouTube videos and all that. You can be anywhere in the world and watch everything. Now, Spiti… just type it and see it. Do you find that it interests children to get to know more, or it just takes them away because now you can experience everything within a safe environment? I see it as a double-edged sword. I don't know how you work with that.

Suhel: Does somebody else want to answer that? I don't have to answer, but discuss.

Chandrashekar: That is not experience. You are just looking at something if you are watching it on YouTube. I am totally afraid of snakes but I can comfortably watch them on YouTube. If I saw a snake, I'd die. Experience is a completely different thing.

Vibha: To take up your point about snakes… Yes, most of us would be too scared to get close. We will never get to see certain things, maybe the mating ritual and so on. So in some sense, it keeps us secure and lets us see things that we never knew. And it can actually give us a sense of "I know so many things. I know about nature. But I want that actual immersive experience".

Suhel: Secure... Has anybody been in an experience outdoors – away from the city and a safe environment – where you have felt scared, where there's been some kind of danger because you are lost, let's say, or don't know your way home, or something like that? I think that being in a dangerous situation and emerging from it unscathed, that's important. It can be utterly life changing. You remember that experience forever and it can change you.

I've had a few of these, trekking in the Himalayas where there has

been a snowfall. We have been blocked away from things. We were trying to climb down a frozen waterfall and were just a whisker away from serious injury. These things have utterly impacted me. Rather than pushing me away from these situations, they have actually drawn me to them. Life should not be about safety and security. It should also be about risk and danger. With children, of course, this risk and danger has to be controlled.

But that's the problem of technology. One is that it maintains its distance. The other is that it makes us feel that the world is a wonderful and safe place. It's a wonderful place, but it is not necessarily a safe place and we shouldn't pretend that it is. We should manufacture semi-dangerous situations, I think, if they don't regularly occur. Technology can assist, but it cannot replace. I think that pretty much everybody would agree on this.

Parminder: This is about how we are using the outdoors. We have this expedition for Grade 4 students, Nature our Teacher. There we have taken this concept of common functions – how the form of a species affects its functions and how functions shape the form. Then they study different birds – for example, spoonbill. Why the beak is shaped like this or why the snake-bird or darter-bird has a long neck…

So they come and study what innovations have been inspired by nature like this – like what came from the spoonbill, or how Velcro was inspired. We go to Bharatpur for five days. You can do it even in parks. I just wanted to share that this is how we have been using the outdoors and nature. We have been doing it for the last five years and it is working really well. Then we do story-writing based on this.

Suhel: Blending in art and creativity is very important, I think. I come from a science background, and we make the mistake all the time that we are talking about the science, about scientific facts. But actually, what is sometimes much more powerful is to include stories and creative writing, and painting and all those sorts of things.

Lokesh: I have two very basic questions. I don't know whether they are relevant, but these are some things that we face every day in our work. One is, when we work with teachers they often say that terms like Environmental Education, Environmental Science and Environmental Study – and now, I just heard for the first time, Nature Education – how

are these different? Sometimes it becomes very confusing.

The second challenge is when we work with teachers in the rural set-up. With children in rural schools, we talk about the curriculum which says that the previous knowledge of the child should be taken into the classroom. Children know a lot about nature – trees and everything. But we often find teachers saying that that's something they already know, so why should we give them something they already know? We tried to tell them that they need to build on the previous knowledge of the child. It is important to bring that into the classroom, but they find it difficult to understand that. Unfortunately, we see teachers teaching Environmental Science in the classroom. They don't think of taking them outside because they feel they already know about it.

Suhel: I don't think the teachers are equipped, usually, to take the children outside. So the first thing is, I don't think there is an agreed upon taxonomy about what to call it – Environmental Education or Science, or Studies, or whatever. So this is just the whim of whoever is setting the syllabus.

The second thing is, I agree that the children – especially forest-dwelling communities – have a lot of knowledge about nature. It turns out that agrarian communities often don't have that much knowledge about nature. So it's not as simple as urban-rural. It is more nuanced than that. But the key thing is that even if they already know it, the school system is where they learn what is important and what is not in the world. And if the school system doesn't at all talk about this, they very quickly come to realize that this is not important – what I have learnt, my stories and my culture and my traditions are not important, my knowledge about these is not important.

So, at the very least, it has to be emphasized and repeated. And the value has to be demonstrated to them so that they don't ignore it as time goes by. But of course, all knowledge is incomplete, including the knowledge we bring, so we have to work to build that knowledge. But I think emphasis and repetition is certainly needed.

Shashi: This is not a question but a small comment. In exploring or in being with nature, for children, there has to be a component of non-protective approach instead of being over-protective – "Don't climb the tree, you will fall" or "Don't go here…" We need to make parents understand that a few cuts and bruises are okay. It's not as if our children

step out and come back all battered and bruised. Even for children, I think they need to explore on their own, so that they can get into bushes, get into little holes and see what is there instead of being scared of doing it.

So some amount of fearlessness and non-protective environment in which they can just do whatever they like is essential. I don't look like it now, but I could climb a tree quite easily when I was younger! And I've fallen hundreds of times. But growing up in Burma, with a very different kind of community, I could be bleeding and those children would come with some leaf crushed in their palms and say, "Here, apply this and it will be fine." And really speaking, I was okay. I'm much stronger than other younger people!

Suhel: Yes, I totally agree. I think I sort of alluded to those points earlier as well. But in addition to being not-so-protective about our children, I think we also need to be not-so-protective about nature in this sense. Nowadays, when most people take children on nature walks and so on, we see the slogan – 'Take nothing but photographs; leave nothing but footprints'. And I utterly, completely, disagree with this. I think children have to get down and dirty. They have to pluck flowers and grub up the dirt, and they have to catch fish if they need to, or insects, or pick up the beetle and turn it upside down… They have to do all these things. Otherwise you are like in a museum where everything is off limits. You can only see, but you can't touch, you can't crush, you can't feel.

People have shouted at me because I have plucked a leaf from a tree and crushed it, so that others can smell. I don't understand that. So it has to be both ways. Children have to engage, have to do a bit of destruction. Children are destructive. At the same time, nature has to take its slight revenge – as you say – in terms of cuts and bruises and so on.

Hardy: I want to ask you a couple of things. If you are interested and actually thinking about taking this forward, as I see you asking, the question is, do we extract the essential parts of it? Because in the presentation and the way we look at it, there will always be contradictions. For example, you don't want to destroy where you are going. You don't want to leave a bonfire. But you also want to take off a leaf. Then you are going on a nature walk and I am on a nature walk. I have a group of people or children with me who are from a different background. So the focus of the nature walk, does it change? Unless we are in some way able to recognize what is the essential that you are talking about in a

nature walk… Is it human-nature relationship? Is it human behaviour? Is it about understanding animals? Are we talking about Biology? Are we talking about Zoology? Or are we talking about Environmental Studies, Environmental Education, Nature Education, or our own life experience?

I think there can be many different ways of taking this forward. And I see the economic reality of human-environment interaction – the social reality. So what aspects of it are essential? We need to have some basic commonality, grounded in some kind of principles. Then we can agree, and see how we can take it forward. Otherwise it will remain as personal ways of dealing with it.

Suhel: That is the situation now. I think everybody who goes out and does this, does it in an idiosyncratic way because most of this is happening outside the formal school system, outside the curriculum. They have not often been forced to sit in one room and say, "Look, we have to design. We have to agree on something as a goal, and then decide how to get there." Those are the people I know. I actually don't know the people who, mostly, are implementing things or designing/implementing, given the curriculum in Environmental Sciences and so on. I know Madhav Gadgil has, to some degree, but not much. So that conversation has not really happened, I think. But it needs to happen.

Alternative school stories from across India –Arun Elassery

After getting his degree from IIT, ARUN ELASSERY drifted through engineering consultancy, software development, e-learning and then ended up as a writer of articles on school education. He states that the only valuable thing he got from his long years of education was the clarity to school his children at home. As part of his association with Wipro Applying Thought in Schools, Arun looked at different alternative schools across the country and tried to understand what makes them alternative.

Arun: I am really uncomfortable because there are so many experts here. I think of myself as an expert on the education of children, but only on the education of my three children. And that's the genesis of this whole project.

Just a little background: we have three children and we have the great good fortune of bringing them up at home, outside the school system. I had the fortune of hanging out at home while this was happening – working from home, or not working from home, or basically hanging out. That is really where this whole project came from. My daughter is 21 years old, and we are now retired home-schoolers. The two boys are in the 10th and 12th, so we don't bother about that any more.

During this journey, we got to meet a lot of people who are in this 'alternative' space – which means organic farming, veganism, alternative energy, nature and so on – and a lot of people whose children either went to alternative schools, or people who were teaching there or had started alternative schools.

I have been working with WATIS for six years, doing different things. One of the projects was to go and visit alternative schools across the country. I knew some of them already, and wanted to go and talk to people – take a slightly closer look. I visited about 30 places and wrote about 24 of them, but the articles were too short. So I wrote two versions. One was small impressions, like an idiosyncratic personal inner take on alternative schooling. We had a laboratory at home – an intense laboratory. And then there was a more detailed thing. I wrote about 24 of these small articles, and they are getting published in Teacher Plus as a column now.

I got to go to some schools that were not on the general list. My initial idea was to talk to people I knew already, so I thought I would go to CFL (Centre for Learning) and Valley School and be done with it! But Anjali

put some more schools on my list – non-mainstream vernacular medium schools in different parts of the country. It was a wonderful journey, with much learning.

I was really looking for wisdom in this whole thing, because I don't claim to be an expert, and I was going to these places where people had been at it for a long time – 20 years or so. It was a search for wisdom in this alternative space, and the short version of that is that I was disappointed. There were some highlights but, largely, the whole journey for me was disappointing.

The overriding impression I got was that nobody has a clue about what is going on. We get caught up in people who talk about education and we miss the whole point about what it is we are talking about. Who is this child we are educating? Do we have a definition about a child?

I am telling this like a personal story, and this is an opinion, really. If you were to say, "Piaget said so and so. What do you have to say?" I am not saying anything – I don't know what Piaget said and the difference it makes.

But let me just stop and ask if you all have any questions.

Maya: You said, by and large you were disappointed. So my first question would be why. What is it that disappointed you? You said nobody has a clue.

Arun: In my own mind, I have a definition about what wisdom means. So from a distance it looks like there is this wonderful experiment, great work happening. If you go a little closer and see, talk to people, it seems like it is not all figured out, not all there. That is why the disappointment. Like I said, I went on this journey with an open mind, thinking these were the people I wanted to look up to, because I've heard stories from outside and had a bit of interaction. A little closer interaction brought this disappointment. Where I was expecting wisdom, there didn't seem to be that.

Hardy: When you have some experiments, there is a lot of glorification and a lot of talk about them. There is always something they don't have. Yet there is something – so what is that? And what is not there? What is the general picture? The interaction will be of value to us, because we have not seen those 30 experiments.

Arun: There is a lot of variety in these experiments – lots of different things. Many of these schools you will already know. But there are schools in the list that you would not have heard of – for example, Muni International, in Delhi. I'll do the story about them, and then get back to your question. The man who started the school, Ashok Thakur, figured out that if you teach one or more foreign languages to children, from 1st Standard onwards, by the time they are in the 12th Standard they are fluent in those and their livelihood has been taken care of. This is a school in a slum in Delhi, for poor children. Once livelihood was out of the way, then the academic part could be peripherally taken care of. It was wonderful. When I went to the school, there were second standard kids who wanted to do Japanese skits and sing German songs!

So there is a wide variety in the experiments that are happening. The disappointment, I think, was that there is this structure that everybody is following, which says that this is how good education happens, and people somehow seem to stay within the structures. I don't think it works that way.

For example, a question Suhel was asked was, can you write down what's happening at Spiti? This is where I come from. When Suhel is going on a nature walk, it is different from somebody who has been given a piece of paper and told that you take people around and show them an ant line or something. So it is to do with who the people are. That's what I mean. Where does the person who is running a school, or the person who is teaching a class, come from? It's not the structure, not the subject matter expertise, or the way that they are delivering it, or saying that it should be child-friendly… All these things are taken care of. Children should not be stressed and a teacher should ensure that. These things are there. But is that a structure? Is a person able to work with that? Hardy, does that answer your question?

Hardy: So what I hear you saying is that alternative schools are a problem because school is a problem – which means that the concept of school is what the problem is.

S C Behar: Supplementing Hardy, I would like to know if you would like to talk about all the 30 or make a generalization. What are the kinds of things you saw that were alternatives? And what are the kinds of things you saw which you think are not alternatives? What are the main features of alternatives that you found, not necessarily in all schools? And what

are the features where you found there is no alternative, where they conform to the usual system?

Ganesh: I am layering your journey to two things. One is that you had a notion of what wisdom is. Are children the means to achieve that wisdom? I don't know whether we have a concurrence on wisdom and are then looking at the means to achieve that. So what is it that you are interpreting?

Abhijhit: I could highlight three-four problems that I typically face with alternative schools – being from one myself – and maybe you could elaborate on that, if those are some areas that you looked at.

One is potentially fuzzy pedagogies and no peer learning outcomes. Maybe this is too radical. There is a wide spectrum of alternative schools, some of which are a mix of state curriculums and alternative philosophies, and some which are completely radical, that move away from any kind of curriculum. So one is about pedagogy and learning outcomes.

Then you have issues of elitism in schools. In alternative schools, it is a very subdued kind of elitism, of reverse snobbery. There is also an overriding sense of smugness that I find permeating a lot of alternative schools. If these are things you looked at, I would really like to hear more.

Arun: Abhijhit has sort of given the list of what I have in my pocket.

To answer Behar-saab, I had a clear idea of what 'alternative' meant with respect to mainstream. There is this book on alternative schools which has a list of 125 schools, and I knew a lot of people who were in the alternative space. So by 'alternative', very broadly was meant schools that are not mainstream. By 'mainstream', we mean schools like Delhi Public School. So there is this idea of what a mainstream school is. Everything outside of that is alternative. That is how I was looking at it.

I think when you talk about alternative, it is where children are not stressed in a school, where there is freedom for children, there is this open classroom concept... Different schools are organized in different ways. Let me only say, it is where children have freedom inside the classroom, where the interaction between the teacher and the child is pleasant for the children.

About the problems... As Abhijhit was saying, what I noticed about these problems was that there is this idea of being anti-mainstream – the whole space, the fact that there is an idea of mainstream and we are

against that. And there is elitism. These are the problems.

Maitreyee: Actually, when you say 'anti-mainstream', what you have done is also anti-mainstream – and that's not disappointing. Could you also clarify what you expected and what you found disappointing?

Geeta: How much time did you spend at each school and how much did you understand of each?

Arun: Not more than a day in each school. I was not interested in the structure. I was looking at the people. My idea was to meet people and talk to them. All the information is available on the website. What is not available is the place, how it feels, and what the people are like. I went, spent half a day to one day, and talked to them. These 30 schools I visited were in that mode. That's a limitation of the project as well.

Avinash: Would you be able to pick up just one or two schools and describe them in some detail? Pick up the ones that you feel you understand the best in some ways.

Arun: Let's talk about the ones I found positive. For example, in Wardha – where Behar-saab was also there for the Nai Taleem conference – there is Anand Niketan. It's a small, Marathi medium school that follows the Nai Taleem philosophy. The structure... I thought similar things were available in other places as well. What is not available is Sushma-ji, who runs the school. When I meet Sushma-ji and see the school she runs, when I walk around with her and she talks to the children, and she shows me around this place, I get this idea that she has a completely nuanced understanding of the whole thing – of the space, of what is happening, what game she is playing in this whole thing and where it is going – which is what is missing in other places. That's what I mean by saying that I was disappointed.

Shall I read what I have written? It is all about things I liked. Everything is positive.

Arun: *I don't think Gandhiji will be pleased to see what they have done to his ashram in Sewagram. Everything is manicured and tourist-ready, and there is a souvenir shop. To top it all, there are small boards put up everywhere saying things like 'Gandhiji took his sunbath on this lawn'. The*

soul has left the place, and only the immaculately preserved mummy exists.

However, Gandhiji would only need to walk into Anand Niketan in the adjoining compound to know that his experiment in Nai Taleem that he started around 1940 – that closed down in 1975 and was revived in 2005 – is doing very well.

Sushma Sharma, the head of Anand Niketan, was in the middle of working with some children when I reached the school. She said she would stop what she was doing because time was adjustable, or I could wait for half an hour. It was almost lunchtime. So I went, had lunch and came back to find her free.

Sushma is a soft spoken, polite, gentle, wise woman. During the time we walked around the school, many teachers and children spoke to her. Her tone with everyone – adult or child – was courteous, and her interactions had the completeness of wisdom. She appeared like she was part of the 'in' group in all the situations.

We were passing in front of a class where there was a commotion. Some small children were talking loudly and laughing. We stopped and asked what was going on. The children explained that some of their friends did not neatly arrange their footwear in the designated place outside the classroom, so they were teaching them a lesson. The friends were away somewhere and the laughing children had hidden their slippers under some bushes in the garden in front of the class. The children told Sushma all this as if she was part of their gang and could see the justice of their actions. I noticed that Sushma enjoyed the exchange but gave no adult value judgement like, "Okay, after they have learnt their lesson, please return the chappals," or even, "That's a good thing that you've done." Wisdom and compassion probably go together in people.

The school campus is spread out and the buildings are the same ones that Gandhiji walked through. I don't know exactly what it is, the location next to the ashram or the spread out buildings, or the large trees everywhere, but there is something utterly charming about the school. It felt like a farm, and the trees and the buildings with their tiled roofs and the small and big people moving through them, all fitted into each other perfectly.

There was a completeness to the picture – perhaps the simplicity of the buildings and the people, or their connection with the local, which Gandhiji emphasized so much. This is not an elite English medium school. The teachers and students speak Marathi all the time.

Some things stick out from my visit – the Montessori-like pre-school with its two large rooms with the work of the children visible everywhere,

the tiny children finishing their meals before leaving for home, the teachers quiet and efficient and mother-like, the crafts room where children were weaving floor mats that they use in school and also sell to make money for the school, the farm area where every child helps in the growing of food for the school, the large maulsari tree in full bloom with its tiny delicately-scented flowers, the museum where the history of the school is chronicled in old black-and-white photographs...

Let me wind up this impression with an excerpt from a story of how the old school used to be. Waking early in the morning, the entire school community consisting of its students and teachers would undertake an hour's safaai (cleaning) of the entire premises, including classrooms, dormitories, buildings, grounds and latrines. Time for bathing, washing clothes and attending to personal cleanliness followed. The community then assembled for prayers, after which there was breakfast. Three hours of shareer shram (physical labour) formed an integral – and perhaps the most important – part of the curriculum. Here too, students and teachers worked together, whether in the fields or in the spinning shed, or later, when the subject was introduced, in the mechanical engineering shed. Study periods would be in the afternoons, after lunch and rest. No textbooks were followed. But all that was taught was related to the work done in the morning. Not just Maths or Economics, but Science, Social Studies, Language and Literature also would be based on the work done. A session of games, in which students and teachers participated, helped to build up an atmosphere of harmony and cooperation. At about 6.30 pm, the whole ashram community would meet for prayers. When Gandhiji was there, he would always attend. And on occasions, he would give a talk after prayers.

The next one is The Learning Community, Auroville:

It is impossible to talk about a school set in Auroville without talking a little about this unique experiment in community living. If you have been there, you can skip this paragraph. Auroville was founded in 1968, some 160 kilometres south of Chennai and ten kilometres north of Pondicherry. It is a community of 2,000 people, one-third of them Indian and the rest from 45 nations around the world. These people are of all ages, social classes, backgrounds and cultures. And probably, as their website claims, represent humanity as a whole. They have come together to experiment in their own lives with the message of human evolution that Sri Aurobindo propounded half a century ago in many thick, difficult-to-read books. What you see if you walk or cycle into Auroville today is a 5000-acre serene, mostly wooded area set with many small farm communities exploring all possible types of

sustainable living arrangements.

There are 800 children studying in the 20 schools that are located in or around Auroville. And all these schools are 'alternative' to various degrees. However, I am only going to talk about a small school that stays true to its name – The Learning Community (TLC) – by using all of Auroville, and especially its farm communities, as its school infrastructure. In fact, the school building, appropriately called Base Camp, appears to only be used in transit by the children.

Soumya, one of the six course teachers at TLC, whom I met in the spreading leisure of an Auroville late evening, explained how their philosophy is not merely another incremental school reform idea. Rather, it integrates learning into the community, where the unforced experiences of the children can lead to context based, individualized child led learning.

I spent some time with the children on one of their regular farm visits the next morning and got a feel of what that actually means. Johnny, 70-plus years old, a tall, white bearded architect clad in a blue lungi, is the owner of Fertile Farm and a bit of a legend in and around Auroville. Even today, he is reputed to go off 60 km to the hills around Ginjee alone on his bicycle, camping outside and probably not bothering with what, if anything, he gets to eat.

As I watched, and then slowly got pulled in by a girl who was having some trouble with paper or glue, the children made box-kites, going "Johnny, Johnny" every three minutes. It was a pleasure watching the wisdom of word and hand which Johnny used to solve the children's tiny and large problems. I came away with no doubt whatsoever that, where possible, this is what education should look like.

The notice I found in a corner of the TLC website sums up, rather neatly, everything that TLC and Auroville stand for. This is the notice: "We are making a hotel for scorpions. We catch them and put them in our hotel so that we can see how they mate and make babies. It is also interesting to watch them fight. It is not only about scorpions. We also catch centipedes and spiders. It is a lot of work to collect food for all of them – creatures like grasshoppers and crickets. At the moment, we have a huge black scorpion that Malavika, Milo and Pele caught, two red scorpions that Nadir and Zozo caught. If you see any interesting creatures, please catch them or contact us as soon as possible at the Red Scorpion Hotel, Base Camp: Nadir, Milo, Jalin, Abhay, Bernabas, Zohar, Pele, Yam, Surya, Aden and Yunsu. If anyone else wants to join us, you are most welcome. Just let us know. And remember, you have to work."

All the ones I wrote about are positive – the non-disappointing part of all 24 of them.

Nomita: I am just wondering whether, when you said 'disappointing', you were expecting some kind of a prescriptive way of an alternative education or an algorithm. What were you expecting?

Arun: Can I explain that a little – not my concept of alternative, but about the structure? There is this concept of a convergent and a divergent problem. This is from (Ernst Friedrich) Schumacher – the idea that the only problems that converge to a solution are problems in the realm of abstraction, of ideas, whereas everything in real life is divergent. The example Schumacher uses in education is – is discipline good or is freedom good? The answer to that depends on when it is asked, who is asking it and in which context. Sometimes discipline is good, sometimes freedom is good.

So what he proposes is that everything in reality diverges. Nothing converges to a solution. In this example, there are these two options. But in reality, there are hundreds of options to each of these things, and you choose one based on who you are, where you come from. That's the realm of wisdom. So it's not to do with structure. That's why structure fails. Because it implies that if something is like this, you do this – whereas in reality you can't use any of the methods. This is where the disappointment came in.

Any feedback?

Maya: I'm trying to understand. So the disappointment came from the fact that it was not converging. Is that it?

Arun: No. I'm talking about people. In the minds of people, if you say that this is the problem, the next thing is how do you solve it? You have to realize that it is not a problem that is to be solved, it is something that you would want to engage with. So where you come from makes a difference. That's what I mean by this wisdom thing – how you are able to use what is available, and take a decision which has no structure to it. It doesn't say that if this is what the child is doing, this is what you should be doing. That's a structure. That's what a convergent problem means. But nothing in reality converges. That's what I mean.

Shashi Rao: I am just going back to what you said in the beginning, that you have an experiment of your own, which is your three children. And now you said your two sons are in the 10th and the 12th. From your experience with alternative schools, what have you done differently with these children?

Can you tell us a little bit about your personal experiences – not about the 24 schools? I would like to know, what is your idea of an alternative that you have provided for your children?

Arun: CFL is everybody's idea of an alternative. I know exactly how it works with my children. And the result is how we interact as a family or how the children appear to other people. I know how not to solve the problem but to engage with that situation so that the outcome is good.

So how do you take this thing to a situation where it's a larger set-up? How do you make it work where there are 30 children? Does the person who is running the show there understand that? This is really important. I am saying, I understand this in the context of these three children because I see the results now. We are finished with it and it has worked for us. But I am not seeing this in the school scenario. Is that clearer?

Yogesh: In the visits to alternative schools, did you find any aspect or practice they follow which you think might be broad-based and used in the common schooling system?

Arun: See, that's what I am saying. I'm not interested in the theories or the structures, or in what is happening there. That is less important than who is doing the work. That is very disappointing. It's not about the fact that children are not stressed. How do we flow through this structure? That's what is actually the real thing in the middle of this.

Nayan: Arun, just to take it further, what you said just now about your three children is that it worked well. In other spaces you visited, you find difficulties somewhere. So do you think it is a scale issue? Or is it the person who is running the show and a person-specific issue?

Arun: I am not the expert. I don't know about this. I was expecting this to be working there as well. I saw that it was not working. That is my problem, and that is what I have not been able to clarify properly.

S C Behar: He is trying to say – I hope that is right – that they are neither alternative nor conventional. It depends upon the persons. Whoever is doing it, that is ultimately either alternative or conventional – not the school as a system. That is what he is saying.

Arun: That's right. If it's not scalable, it's not sustainable.

Devika: I come from Pune, so I know about Akshar Nandan. We have many such examples in Pune of alternative schools. If it is so linked to just one individual, whether it is a Sushma Sharma or Vidya in Pune, what is it that we consider alternative? Why do you consider CFL alternative? But I know one thing – many of these schools, if they are linked to just one personality and if it is not really permeating the entire system, which is what we don't see happening, then the idea is not sustainable. It is sustainable as long as that individual exists. It's not scalable either. That's why they remain on a small island. That's the worry – how do you scale it?

Anjali: It depends upon what you are calling sustainability. Would a tree be sustainable? It gets finished, it dies. Do you want pyramids, or do you want trees? That is the question – not sustainability.

Arun: It's exactly as you are saying. In my inexpert opinion, in places where it was working, it was working because of the individual. With Vidya, I thought it worked. I asked her, "You are old, you are retiring. Do you have a mechanism for making this go on?" And she said no.

So I am saying that I don't have the answers. Where it was working it was because of a wise individual. This is where the word 'wisdom' is coming from also, because Vidya and Sushma Sharma are wise women. Sushma claims to run a mainstream school. When I wrote to her first, she said, "We are not alternative. We are mainstream."

Making films in education and finding purpose– Jagjot Singh

JAGJOT SINGH is an 'authentic-film' maker who has been working in the field of education. It is important to him as a story teller that the stories his films tell should be meaningful and must help solve some kind of problem. Among other projects, he has been working with the Azim Premji Foundation to make a series of films on good government schools to help change the narrative around the public education system. Jagjot also runs a non-profit organization - DOST - to create social impact authentic film making.

Jagjot: Hi, I'm Jagjot. I've been working with the WATIS team for close to four years doing films, different kinds of videos. One is, of course, summary videos, where the idea is to take an hour-and-a-half-long session and condense it into a 10-15-minute watchable video, because nobody's got the time to watch hour-long videos these days. Apart from that, we have also worked on making films on projects that WATIS supports. For example, one of the films was on SeasonWatch, one on Digantar – films related to education – and a series of educational films for Earthian when the programme was started in 2013, on water trails and water quality. The programme was launched along with workbooks and these videos. So that is broadly the kind of work that I have been doing.

I would like to start by showing you a film I have made – a 16-minute film on Digantar, which is very close to my heart.

(The film is set in Digantar Vidyalay, in Jaipur. Capturing close to a 40 year old journey, the film explores the pedagogy and the fundamentals of education of this alternative school. The film can be viewed here: http://dostfilms.org/digantar-a-change-in-direction/)

When I started out, for me, what was most important about making films at that time was that I wanted to tell stories. It didn't matter what the story was or who it was for. As long as I got to tell them, I was happy. I did this for a while and quite enjoyed myself. I even got a lot of time to reflect, to watch TV shows and so on. Then I suddenly found myself struggling with motivation.

While I was doing films, I had somewhat lost purpose as to why I was doing them. It was not just about telling stories any more. Then, interestingly, this Digantar project came along. I found myself in Jaipur, and I spent a few days at Digantar. I think it was during the course of making this film... I don't know what it was – the people, the energy –

but I realized that I wanted to focus my energies in making films for the development sector. And what is very important is that my films should help solve problems. That is key for me. So, before making any film now, I ask: how is this film going to help? What problem is it going to solve?

From there onwards, we started working with APF (Azim Premji Foundation). We have been doing this series of films on good initiatives in the public education system, where we visit government schools, find best practices, and make films on these best practices. There are of course a lot of challenges in the public education system, despite which there is a lot of good work being done. We are trying to create a narrative around the public education system. Hopefully, we can show these films to other teachers to motivate them and train them. That's the kind of trajectory I took.

Recently, I started DOST (Directors of Social Transformation), an organization through which I attempt to make more films like this.

That's all I have to say for now. I welcome any feedback that you have – if there's some guidance you would like to give me.

Vidya: You said you were making regular films before you set up DOST, and then you went to film the Digantar project. You said something changed in your life at that point in time. Can you tell us how?

Jagjot: Like I said, I don't know what it was.

Vidya: Why don't you try and articulate it? It's most interesting because very often, the transition from mainstream to a slightly more alternative perspective is never very well-articulated. And one wonders what it is. If you can tell us of maybe some experience?

Jagjot: I think the simplest way to answer that question would be to say that I started thinking about more than just myself. When I made a film, it used to be about me making a film. When I went to Digantar, I saw that people think beyond just themselves. People actually, despite so many challenges, try to make a difference. Basically it's thinking about more than just yourself. I started to do that.

Maya: My question is very similar. You said you found that you were having a problem with motivation. So what you say is that motivation comes from doing something beyond yourself?

Jagjot: Yes.

Devika: I really enjoyed the film on Digantar. You said you are now making films in the development sector. This particular film on Digantar, which was probably shot over the two days or three days that you were there, captures it in ways of interviewing people – in terms of interviewing the stakeholders as well as the children. Was there a script? Did you know what questions you wanted to ask? Was there something you had prepared beforehand? That is one question.

I have seen a lot of good films made by Deepa Dhanraj as well – the Young Historian series and The Jataka, and The Vachanas and so on. That's a different model where the work of that organization is highlighted in terms of some project that is happening, which is shot over those days – the entire project. You get to see it the way it is happening, and not just by interviewing people. So when you make films for the development sector, would you like to highlight some of their projects, even if it means a long-term engagement? Have you done something like that?

Jagjot: I haven't done anything like that. However, in the film that I was talking about earlier – on SeasonWatch – we tried to bring out the essence of the project. SeasonWatch had been running for two years at the time when we made the film, and what we tried to do was bring out two years' worth of that story, what had happened. It was a similar approach but I think it was a ten-minute film. So that was a film trying to summarize and showcase a project done over time. But again, that was shot over a week.

About the script, it actually depends on the kind of format. Of course, it definitely needed a script, otherwise it's impossible to make a film like this. This 16-minute film would have had at least six to seven hours of footage. I start out with a basic framework. I ask three questions: Whom is this film for? What is it about? And why do we want to make this film? These three questions, once answered by whoever the film is on, allow me to develop a framework of questions I want to ask, to think visually in terms of how I want to show certain things. And based on that, we go out and do a shoot.

Before we shoot, we do a recce. So I actually spent four days in Digantar just sitting over there and observing, and making notes. Based on that, I came up with this framework. And then we went out and did the shoot. We shot for about seven days in total, in Digantar. And after that – this is a pretty lengthy process – after we get all the footage in the

can, we come back and sit and transcribe all the interviews. From those we start to develop a script – the different bits and pieces, we join them, move them around…

I have a huge desk in my studio. So I print a whole bunch of A4 sheets, take a glass and a cutter, and I start cutting out paragraphs. Then I kind of make a visual script of the content – a content map. Then it goes on the editing table, and those narratives are cut, visuals are chopped alongside, they are mixed, music is added, and the film is ready. That is my process.

Madhubanti: You are making films on the development sector. So who is your target audience? Are you planning to circulate the films? Will a film be seen within the development sector, or do you have a larger audience in mind? In that case, how do you plan to increase your visibility?

Jagjot: I was hoping you guys could help me with this question: who is the target audience for these films? Let me take the example of the film series that I am doing with APF right now, which is on good initiatives in the public education system. One film is about a single-teacher school. We are trying to show the challenges and the good work being done. So one kind of prospective target audience would obviously be the teachers who can be shown this, or someone who can relate to it.

A film such as that would help teachers who are working in the field, because they would relate to those ground realities and get an idea of what we are trying to say. But then, of course, the details that go into making a film like that may not be the ones that someone who is not from an education perspective is interested in. So we are also doing a five-minute version, which is potentially for a broader viewership. Who the target audience is also depends on what the film is about and why we are trying to make it. But if you have any suggestions, I would love to hear them.

S C Behar: I welcome you to the development sector. Number two: Be careful. It is not a sector where you can earn enough. Number three: You cannot focus – as you said in the beginning – on solutions. The development sector has no solutions. It has more problems than solutions. Solutions may emerge, or may not emerge. The focus should not be on solutions.

Next, the development sector is a sector of conflicts. Don't take it so simply. You have to decide where you are, and with whom you are.

You can, in the development sector, show a large dam and the great advantages from irrigation and, say, electricity. On the other hand, you can focus on the problem that it submerges villages. Or you can do both. Yet, when you are doing both, somehow your sympathy has to come out in what you are trying to indicate – which really means a larger social perspective: understanding society, its dynamics, and where you want to stand.

The answer to the first question was very good – thinking, from me to others. But others are of both kinds – Birlas and Tatas, and those in the slums. When I used to talk to students, everybody would say they wanted to do "national service". And I would say, what is national service – working for Tata? And they would say, "Yes, because they are contributing to development."

However, in my view, since there are very few people in this area, it is very good that you have decided to come, and have been motivated to come. But probably it is important to understand the kind of terrain you are entering before you finally take the plunge. And I would suggest you do take the plunge. I will encourage it! However, don't take it as a simple area. It's not entertainment. It's highly conflict ridden and highly demanding. It requires – needs – people like you who would be willing to come.

Jagjot: Thank you, Behar-saab.

Kanupriya: I have two or three things to say. One is, your process of physically cutting – it's pretty much how ethnographers work.

Jagjot: I went right at it, actually.

Kanupriya: Ethnographers go out and do interviews for hours and hours, and then pick out little bits and find the theme. Your process is probably like that.

The second thing: How do you disseminate – you asked that question about increasing viewership – in this age of audio-visual media where we are constantly watching things on WhatsApp and Facebook, and content is everywhere? Again, it's a matter of prying apart the good content from the bad. Then there is this assault of content all the time on everybody. As a sector, traditionally, we have not been very good at advertising ourselves and talking about our work because we are always

so submerged in it that it's not easy to find the right medium and the right voice to talk about it.

So, just like Goodbooks does for children's work, as a sector we need a medium that is curated, where it is not getting lost in this crowd of media that we are getting bombarded with. I am thinking of the website The Better India, which has positive stories from around the country. We need some place to collect these initiatives that are positive voices and should be heard. It's like Humans of Bombay where you read some really great stories. Maybe we need places like that where we can share stories about education and other things.

The third is a very practical thing. For the last two years, I was working with the West Bengal government to put in place a reading programme for Grades 1 and 2. And you know, when you work with governments, budgets are always really tight, time is next to nothing, and expectations are sky high. They want to cover 40,000 schools in one year, and suddenly say that the next year they want to tell Delhi that all their teachers know how to go about early grades reading. That is the reality of the government system. If you choose to work with it, you have to work within those boundaries.

Because we had only two days of training time, we made these two-minute videos – 22 of them – on very micro classroom processes, like how to do a storytelling session. We made them just short enough to be shared on WhatsApp. So it is also up to us to leverage the technologies that teachers have now. In West Bengal at least, eight out of ten teachers have smartphones. All we did was to give out SD cards at the master training, and the videos have gone viral. That was the idea we started with.

Echoing what Behar-saab said, even within the development sector, there is good and bad. What do you want to show? And how do you want to show it? What is the purpose of it?

S C Behar: I thought what I said implied it, but let me make it clear. It also means understanding development. Is organic farming development? Or is using fertilizer and pesticide and having more production development? There are all types of development. There is a model of Gandhi for development, and there is a Western model of development. So one has to understand how development can have very different meanings.

As I said, it was implied in the social philosophy that I talked about.

You have to understand all that properly and then find your notch, where you position yourself. I can understand that it could be probably be decided later. Somehow you are showing sympathy with us – the marginalized – and trying to project as if you are neutral!

Prasoon: When I look at this film, it gives me lots of hope. But it is not answering deeper questions – Rohit-ji and Reena-ji must have thought about deeper questions that led to Digantar.

Another way of looking at it is that you are trying to propagate certain kind of ideas and saying that there are three things you can think of – education, freedom and no exams. You are again trivializing. It is like advertisements – some baba coming and telling you things, or some kind of tea which tells you that you will become slim.

The third important thing is, could you think of a film that raises more questions than it answers? Perhaps it should leave the audience with lots of questions rather than solutions, and also encourage the people for whom you are making the films to talk about what they have not been able to do – what questions they have rather than answers they feel they have given.

Jagjot: A film like that can definitely be made. But it also depends upon the objective with which we set out to make that film. In the case of Digantar, it was to share their story. It was in no way to replace the depth that Rohit-ji or Reena-ji bring to the narrative, but to only support. For example, if tomorrow Rohit-ji goes and talks to a set of people who don't know about Digantar, in 16 minutes he can give a brief overview and then go deeper.

Rohit: I want to say two small things. I think this question is very genuine. And sometimes I wonder if film could be a medium to explore deeper concerns. Have you noticed that deeper concerns are usually very boring? Try to get into depth of some issues, and you will find that 50 per cent of the people will be sleeping within the first ten minutes.

So it seems to me that a way of communicating deeper concerns in such a manner that it doesn't become boring could be a breakthrough for you, Jagjot, in films. This might work well. Those are kinds of films you perhaps have to have. They will have to be longer. But that could be a breakthrough. I usually feel that films, when they start exploring deeper things, are very boring if they are documentary films.

Simantini: We've been making films for many years, which we show in bastis. Selecting your audience and setting out with an agenda can be one approach, and certainly has place in a certain kind of work. But "long documentaries are boring" is a myth. India has one of the extremely vibrant atmospheres where a huge amount of very, very interesting documentary work takes place. It is, in fact, leading in the world. I just wanted to say that.

Anjali: In terms of the shooting and so on, the children's work was continuously just visual with music. In many educational films, it is more interesting to have a discussion on what is happening in those shots. That part is also sometimes scripted – not just the interviews. In fact, documentaries become boring if there are too many interviews. So when you are shooting next time, you have to shoot much more footage of children and work, and then edit. At least that is what I – and some of the other people who use these films – find much more useful.

In this, one cannot see any children interaction. There is just the music playing and the visuals.

Jagjot: Thank you. I think you will get to see some of that in the new series that is going to be coming soon.

A Framework for Social & Emotional Learning– The Teacher Foundation

The Teacher Foundation (TTF), Bangalore, is an organization that focuses on training teachers and aims at infusing the school education system in India with new energy, enthusiasm and expertise. MAYA MENON, the Founder, Director and MISBAH SHAHID, AKHILA DORASWAMY and MONILA SAPRE, her colleagues have been working on an intensive, exploratory research at TTF, looking at the field of social and emotional learning (SEL) to try and develop a framework for SEL that can be used in the Indian school context.

Maya: The Teacher Foundation is a 14-year-old organization, and perhaps the oldest of the Wipro Partners' Forum. We do a lot of different kinds of programmes, and the one we have come to talk to you about today is four years old. This is the first time we are addressing and sharing this research project with a larger audience. So far we have had a series of consultation meetings with academics, psychologists, psychiatrists, policy makers and, of course, the WATIS team.

So with that as a caveat, I am going to give you a little bit about the background of our work, and then an overview of the project stages: What an integrated Social Emotional Learning (SEL) framework is; Phase I Empirical Study; Phase II Empirical Study; and lastly, the next steps.

The affective – social-emotional – domain of schools, children, etc. has been of enduring concern and interest for us at The Teacher Foundation. We have done a lot of work, partly because Prof. Krishna Kumar talks about the teacher as a "meek dictator". Yesterday Pammi also referred to the teacher as this authority in the class. This image of the teacher as an authority who comes down heavily on the student has always bothered us. You need to talk about student-centred learning, child-centred learning, learner-centred learning... That is one aspect of the background.

I am talking to people who know it better, perhaps, but the other is that there has been always this overarching focus on academic learning, coverage of syllabus, curriculum, academic subjects, etc.

The third is the absence of a vibrant and authentic student voice in our school systems. If children speak, it is only to answer a question that the teacher has posed. If students speak, it is to ask a question, with a little bit of trepidation, to the teacher. And if students speak, it could be perhaps when they are talking among themselves. But rarely do they speak to discuss issues concerning them, their school, or concerning the wider world. It's almost as if children don't think it is okay to speak out

and say what they feel about what bothers them, what affects them and so on. So that's another concern.

Then, of course, in the light of the Central Board of Secondary Education's (CBSE) Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) focus on life skills, values and attitudes, there seems to be attention on the affective domain – on social-emotional learning, things like teamwork and cooperation skills, empathy, etc.

Lastly, is the absence of any discourse among practitioners – because we work with practitioners. While we are not essentially a research organization, we do research that involves or affects or influences practitioners. In the absence of any discourse among practitioners, what do we mean by holistic development of students? What does it need to entail?

I want to give you two questions and one comment as part of our background. Are we raising moral children in a larger sense? And are we nurturing empathy, tolerance and resilience? Those are the two questions, and here's a comment. Author John Hayes may not be necessarily connected to education, but he says: "We tend to overvalue the things we can measure and undervalue the things we cannot." Empathy, tolerance, resilience and a sense of personhood are not things we can typically measure, so what is their value? If we think that something is of value, we need to identify and measure it in some form – not necessarily in grades, marks and exams and so on, but we need to be able to identify it and understand it.

So why Standards for Social-Emotional Learning (SSEL)? To help teachers align what they teach and how they teach with what they want their learners to demonstrate in terms of social-emotional competencies. How do we align what teachers teach and how they teach, to what they want children to become as human beings?

There is another thing I want to underline. This is not intended as a prescriptive standard for social-emotional learning. But four years is a long time, and we've put in a lot of hard work – agonized over it, discussed it and so on and so forth. We want to be able to provide some kind of a framework, without being prescriptive, which provides some broad, clear educational goals and benchmarks. One, to support high quality instruction through professional development for teachers. Because if we are looking at teachers being attuned to students' social-emotional dimensions, then we definitely need to look at how we can support teachers and provide professional development, so that they

can provide children the kind of support they need to. Also, to provide guidelines to teachers to monitor students' progress and development in this domain – and I am using the word 'monitor' very, very gingerly.

Our study began in April 2012. We've had a few hiccups and challenges along the way, when we've gone back and forth discussing, clarifying, modifying our stance and so on. So it's been exactly four years, and this project will finish with its full data collection only by the end of this year, which is December. So by the time we actually come up with some kind of a framework, it will be the middle of next year.

Our objectives are:

- To gather data from the key stakeholders in schools – heads, teachers and students – on existing understanding and perceptions of what social-emotional development is, in their view.
- To identify the key social-emotional competencies based on literature reviews, research from across the world, as well as the field study where we are actually gathering data from across the country.
- To identify the key social-emotional competencies that may be desirable to develop in each of our children in schools or elsewhere.
- To develop standards for social-emotional learning for these competencies across age groups. The age groups we are looking at are Grades 1 to 12 – so six years to 18 years – for all Indian schools. We are not looking at just private or just government schools.
- Finally, to provide guidelines for teachers to facilitate social-emotional learning in students across grades.

The expected outcomes are threefold

- A comprehensive literature review and research on the existing understanding of the affective domain across the world. We have also tried to look at Indian literature and national documents, etc.
- To work out a comprehensive Indian social and emotional learning framework comprising age-appropriate standards for facilitating social and emotional learning amongst the children.
- To look at writing for publications as a research report stemming from this project, and provide guidelines for teachers in schools to facilitate SEL learning amongst their students.

Now over to Misbah.

Misbah: Currently, we are at the end of Stage 4 of our study, where we

have been collecting data from the larger group of schools. We have done a lot of focused reviews of the existing literature on SEL that is out there. We didn't find so much within the Indian context. It was more outside. What the literature focused on was an understanding and definition of this whole affective domain of social-emotional competencies – what it means, what it is seen as.

We also looked at certain key developmental theories which actually underpin this social-emotional learning – whether it is cognitive based social learning theories, or theories on moral development and empathy. We looked at research that stated the link between the exposure of children to a very focused process of social-emotional learning and the impact it has on their overall wellbeing and even academic performance. We looked at literature or research which actually suggests that.

We did a study of different models that are out there, either programmes or frameworks that actually make an attempt to develop this learning among children. And we also looked at our own national education based documents – the NCF (National Curriculum Framework), peace education, and different position papers – to see what they say in the realm of the social-emotional learning space.

After that we wanted to try and put together an integrated framework. There were three models that have been popularly implemented – basically the Collaborative Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework. This is an NGO in the US that's done a whole lot of work in this field and come up with a framework, like competencies. We looked at that and also studied the SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) programme from UK and the WHO's (World Health Organization's) life-skills programme.

When we did a comparative study of the three, there were five competencies that came out and overlapped: the awareness of self, self-management, social awareness, relationship management and decision making. These were reflected in all the three frameworks. So we took them, and also put them together in the form certain learning standards and performance indicators, which again was reflected in a framework derived from CASEL. The state of Illinois had worked on it.

A sample of the preliminary framework that we put together was just an example of, let's say, self-awareness, where one of the standards is being able to recognize personal qualities. This was like an age-wise indicator or benchmark that kind of graduated to what children could do in Grades 1-3, 4-5 and so on. That sample was outside our Indian context,

so of course we had a lot of discussions after that to see how we could adapt it, how we could make sure that it would be relevant and practical for teachers out here.

Then we looked at an empirical study in two phases. Phase I was to try to find out if the age band or the age appropriateness was relevant and appropriate for our Indian schools. With that objective, we developed two questionnaires. One was on social-emotional learning milestones, where children naturally begin to do things at certain ages. Another questionnaire stemmed directly from the integrated framework where it said that at a certain age certain emotional learnings could be developed in these kids.

So we actually went out to a group of mental health professionals – psychologists, counsellors, child-development specialists as well as to a group of school practitioners, and administered this questionnaire. The whole process was trying to elicit their opinion about these age bands, based on their experience – did they feel that these standards happened at that age, or much later or earlier?

Akhila: Phase II of the study again looked at validating the age bands with a larger sample group, mostly teachers, heads and students. So what we aimed at getting through the data from the Phase II was, again, validation of age bands – with a larger sample group of mostly teachers, heads and students – and gathering current knowledge and perceptions of social and emotional learning among teachers. This relates to prevalent behaviour among children again in the age group of 6-18, so it could be behavioural issues or challenges that teachers face in schools. Then we looked at current practices that schools in India are using to develop social-emotional learning, and also the values that are desired and encouraged by teachers.

We again had very exhaustive questionnaires for the teachers, which looked at awareness of social-emotional learning, their observations about the prevalent behaviour amongst students, the practices in their school to develop social-emotional learning, the validation of age bands – with inputs on whether a particular competence could be developed at a certain age – and the values they hold important.

Students' questionnaires had two versions – one for Classes 4-8, another for Classes 9-12 – that looked at behaviours and practices. Another questionnaire was for heads, and looked at awareness and values. We had group interviews with teachers to look at these three

aspects, and an interview with heads. So these were our data collection tools, which were both quantitative and qualitative.

For tool development, we did a vigorous process of validation of the key constructs, where we operationalized them and looked at their relevance to the study. We then developed the tools, which went through two rounds of pilot testing and refining before being finalized.

Monila: To add a bit, the first as well as second round of the pilot testing was done in the sample schools that were going to be visited in Phase II. So we actually went to the private high, mid and low end schools, as well as to government schools in both rounds of pilot.

Akhila: The data collection again had two phases. The pre-study was quite a rigorous process of identifying schools as per the criteria, and identifying volunteers in each of the cities. The data collection was done across 50 cities in India. We looked at both government as well as private schools, and covered a total of 90.

The pre-study looked at obtaining permissions and consent forms. That was quite a challenge: getting permission from schools, especially government schools, scheduling the study with them, briefing the study associates, and organizing the travel and logistics. Then came the implementation of the study. Post-study, it was data entry, back translations, filing and storing.

To collect the data we went across to 15 cities, urban and rural, across the five zones of India – north, south, east, west and northeast. We covered 90 schools, both government and private, 1,080 teachers, which was 12 teachers per school across grades, and 4,320 students. We had 30 group interviews, and so had to translate our tools into ten different languages.

Right now, we are almost towards the end of our data collection and have started the initial data analysis. We've planned the analysis so that the findings fit into the process document and guidelines, and the SEL framework. The process document and guidelines are those that will help teachers to apply the framework to their schools.

Data collection was quite an interesting experience. We travelled to 11 of the 15 cities that we had to get data from, and no city failed to surprise us, either pleasantly or unpleasantly. One thing I noted was that though we had repeatedly spoken to the teachers and principals during the pre-study and they knew exactly what we required, in almost all

schools, when we landed they still had lots of questions and teachers or the head or the required number of students wouldn't be available. Those were some of the unpleasant surprises and challenges that we had to face.

Another thing, quite amusing, was that when we gave detailed instructions before the teachers started answering their questionnaires, we observed that students were much quicker at getting the instructions and had fewer queries, while with teachers kept asking very small, silly questions.

Another observation was how the female teachers – sorry, I am making a discrimination here – would have these very vocal complaints about the length of the questionnaire, and there was a lot more talk among them despite our reminding them that they were to answer it in silence and not discuss. But the male teachers were very focused, there was no talk among themselves, and they had a very matter-of-fact approach – "Okay, if I have to do it, I'll do it." These were things we observed across schools.

We have started our analysis and findings, which will lead to developing the final framework for the standards for social-emotional learning and the guidelines. Then we will pilot the framework, which is another big task, and then, as Maya also mentioned, will be the publication of the research and sharing at various forums. Thank you.

Q&A

Yogesh: In your study, you said that you have started doing initial analysis. Were there any major differences you found between private and public schools? Secondly, among the ten places you covered there was no mention of the rural. So is that out of the study?

Rohit: Your two questions...

Are we raising moral children? Empathy and resilience and tolerance are very broad categories. How do you see a child – whether he is a moral child or not – as an adult? You must be having something in your framework. Could you say a little more about what kind of a being you would call moral and what kind of a being would not classify as moral?

Also the indicators for empathy and resilience and tolerance... These are words. But what lies in them?

Komal: I would like to know what the criteria were when you chose those six schools in a city. Was it the school size, the number of students, or what?

Can you also share some of the examples of the tools you used? How did you try to measure it through your questionnaires?

Jim: Partly echoing Rohit's questions, what were your operational categories? In one of the slides, you say 'vigorous construct analysis' or construct validation. You will have to share a little more of that, so we understand. And I think one slide, which was very crowded, had all the indicators though we could hardly see it.

But parallel to the question about urban and rural, if you are talking about child development – especially the emotional – there is a sort of sequence. We have many models. Psychologists have talked about it. So are there differences between boys and girls, for instance, that you find? In an all-girls' school and an all-boys' school, is this trajectory different? These are some of the questions that your preliminary analysis might throw up, which would illuminate this whole question of what seems to be a normal sequence of development, before you get to standards. But basically, I am interested in the operational meanings of resilience and so on, which is what Rohit asked.

Ramkumar: The way you have conceptualized the study is very interesting. I have three observations. From the way the frameworks have been evolved, it appears that they have been drawn from Western countries – you had the UK, US and WHO frameworks. Is there any Indian framework to suit Indian needs? That is one. The second is that, among stakeholders, you have not included parents. Why have they been left out? The third is, how do you position the school and home connect when the social-emotional learnings are derived from the home and also facilitated in the school?

Maya: The first question was about private schools…

Misbah: I think the question was, how did we select the schools and why are there no rural areas? In each of those 15 cities, we looked at the urban part of the city, and at adjoining rural areas, which could be a hundred kilometres away. This was purely because of logistical reasons. We would

spend a certain number of days in an area, so we made sure the rural area wasn't very far off, but still fulfilled the criteria of being one.

Maya: Rohit's questions – preliminary questions – about what we were thinking about in the area of the social-emotional domain. What do we mean by empathy? Definitions or descriptions of empathy are there as a part of our literature review and we can share that with you. I think we've had discussions earlier, but we will share that with you. Similarly, what we mean by tolerance is getting along with people. Resilience is being able to manage yourself. There are descriptions and indicators for each of these in the literature we surveyed.

With regard to morals, it is like an overarching question. I am not saying I have an answer or a definition or a description at this point. Hopefully, maybe at the same time next year, when we come up with a little bit more understanding of what the data is telling us, I might be able to put forth an explanation. But I think the moral dimension of education and learning is critical. What we consider right or wrong, what we consider good or bad – I think those are aspects of what education is about. I can't give you a packed definition as yet, keeping in mind pan-India, because I don't have one as yet. I'm not sure I have answered your question, but it's a research in progress.

Rohit: The reason I asked is that to me these are two different categories. I can define empathy and resilience. Even tolerance is slightly difficult in psychological terms, while whether something is moral or not is impossible to define in psychological terms. There seems to be a gap. So if you are coming from the psychological terms – or operationally defined psychological terms – to moral conclusions, there might be a serious problem. If you don't do that, what gives us the meaning?

Anyway, we can leave that out. Similarly, tolerance could be moral or immoral. Resilience could be moral or immoral. And I can have empathy with very immoral characters. So all this is a rather mixed up affair.

Maya: Which is what I said, that we are sharing this with a lot of trepidation because, yes, it's open to different kinds of interpretations. So when we come up with, hopefully, a framework, then maybe we would be able to define it in a little bit more detail.

Jim Tharu's question on the construct... Yes, it's related. But you also wanted to understand how we went about the operational part of it. The

team will answer that.

Monila: Validating the constructs of our study was basically about awareness, which has two aspects to it. One is the knowledge of a particular phenomenon, and the second is perception of it. It can be positive, it can be negative, you can have an attitude towards it, you can have a belief about it. We operationalized it as knowledge that teachers have about social-emotional learning and what their perception is about it. So this is our definition of that construct. And on the basis of this definition, we came up with questions that would generate information about the same.

Maya: We can share with you the rest of the documents.

Ram's question about Indian cases... Actually, we scanned all documents possible. There isn't any Indian study. Ambedkar University has done something for standards of social-emotional learning in pre-school. But they finish at five years, which is why we are taking off from five. But theirs was far more narrowly focused, whereas I think we have agonized over it a longer time. That is one thing.

Secondly, because of the absence of any Indian research in the field, we looked at Indian documents. We looked at the Preamble to the Constitution, we looked at the NCF, of course, we've looked at the NCERT (National Council for Educational Research and Training) position papers, peace education, etc., so that we could get something from India rooted in national documents, which has some sort of bearing on social-emotional development and learning.

Then, we've talked to people from across the country – academicians, psychologists and so on – to get some input, in case we've missed out something they knew about. But they were willing to guide us, and that's about it. There weren't any other documents there.

The other important question on parents: I think we actually discussed that. Maybe the team can talk about it.

Monila: Parents were actually going to be a part of our respondents. And during one of our pilots, we actually tested it out with them. What we found was that the turnout rate was very poor. Secondly, the literacy rate of parents also differed a lot, because we were covering rural as well as urban areas. Plus, in private high-end schools, the parents would be working; in the low-end schools, parents wouldn't be available. All this was posing a lot of logistical challenges. In order to maintain the

uniformity of our research process, we then decided that we wouldn't go ahead with parents.

Misbah: How did we go about choosing the schools? We knew the broad category we had – that we are looking at private and government schools. Among private schools, we looked at low fee, mid fee and high fee paying ones. So we had defined our categories. Based on that, in cities where we knew the schools, we sent out requests based on the category. In the cities that we didn't know, we took the help of a few partner organizations who connected us with certain schools. With government schools, we had to obtain permission from the state governments.

Maya: There were a lot of other challenges also, because we had to make sure – from a research point of view, we kept the ethical dimension – that the school was informing the parents that we were administering these questions to the students and so on. Because we had to publish it eventually, we needed to have gone through the right process. It is tough. So the school sent out letters to each of the parents. But frankly, I don't think all the parents sent back permission. It was passive consent.

Misbah: Where we knew the children would be selected from a particular section, we asked the school to send out letters to parents of that section.

Akhila: To add to the criteria for schools, we tried to make sure we had schools that had classes from 1 to 12, as well as mixed sets. As far as possible, we tried to meet these criteria across the cities.

Maya: Jim's question about girls, boys... We will have to find out later.

Misbah: Actually, when we looked at schools, we chose predominantly co-educational schools. And of course, when we do an analysis, gender will be one of our criteria.

Jim: The point I was raising was, we are looking at a developmental trajectory which we are trying to understand. The sample selection does not have to follow what we normally do when we are talking about IT in schools and team-teaching in schools, where you want urban/rural – for instance, between ashram shaalas, between Navodaya schools, between Kendriya Vidyalayas, and between the KGVPs (Kasturba Gandhi Balika

Vidyalayas), which are not really schools.

I am saying that is another way of looking at this. That would be a dimension. If you still have data collection, you might find some way of illuminating this problem by looking at that axis of the environment within which the child is developing, other than the more standard situations. This is just a suggestion – you don't have to answer this.

Vijay Gupta: My question is more about the nomenclature. I was wondering whether we should be using this term 'social-emotional learning standards' or would we be more comfortable using a term like 'life-skills'? I am saying this because, when you were showing us one of the slides, you were also talking about things like decision making. Would you like to call decision making a social-emotional learning standard, or a life-skill? And then we also get into the issue of affective domain, cognitive domain, and whether they are separate or together. Therefore I thought it would be better to use a term like life-skills – although it is also an umbrella term and people can put anything under it. But I think 'social-emotional learning standards' probably does not reflect what you are trying to do.

S C Behar: UNESCO has recently been trying to call these transversal skills.

Margaret: Why did you select social and emotional development? Was there a need for it? Usually we hear about intellectual development and skill development from educators. This is something interesting you started with, and it is a very important aspect.

Geeta: One of the slides said that you did the pilot project twice, worked on the tools once again, and then implemented it in some of the same schools or centres.

Maya: The same kinds of schools – not the same schools.

Geeta: Okay. I understand there were variables that would have needed some changes when you checked with the pilot. Could you just put some light on what the variables were? Like you mentioned, one of them was parents, and you thought initially that you could do it with them and then you realized that it was not a good idea. Were there some other variables?

Keerti: The indicators you identified, were you looking at them in a disembedded kind of way, as developmental milestones that happen across a large population? Or were you also looking at the context specific factors which may impact them? The reason I am asking this is that, in my limited understanding, I am not able to grapple with how social-emotional factors or competencies can be viewed across a largely diverse population. So if you could throw more light on that?

Chandrashekar: What are the actual tools you are using for analysis? That is one thing. Secondly, I am trying to understand how this works but am not able to. You say you do not have any specific definitions for morals and for the set of terms that you had?

Maya: No, I just said that about morals. But we do have descriptions of what would be considered for each of the competencies.

Chandrashekar: Okay. My other question is about consent. In the urban schools, you had consent that the school got for you from the parents. But did the same thing happen in the rural schools?

Ganesh: Did you have any hypothesis when you started this? Or any notion, not necessarily to prove that hypothesis right, but as a starting point? I know that you have done a lot of work in defining, looking at the scope, etc. But is there an in-built hypothesis with which you started?

Radhika: How objective would the assessment of teachers be? Aren't there lots of assumptions when it comes to children developing – especially with something as ambiguous as social and emotional?

I am also thinking of – it's a different context, but sort of similar – a book review workshop with teachers where they were introduced to the concept of a review, what a good book is. That it needn't be a 'moral' story, there are morals in the story itself if there are values in the story, and all that. But finally, when you make the teachers write reviews… You did exactly what we had done – given pointers about not doing and why not to do. So wouldn't that be a problem? It kept coming back to my mind – saying something as straightforward as that. Or maybe it's not so straightforward. Something like what you are attempting is far more ambiguous, far more complex.

Lokesh: I found it very interesting, but it reminds me of an example. Last year, in our state, on the last page of the CCE were mentioned some 50-odd aspects of social-emotional learning – forgiveness, helping others and so on. I was in a school, and the teacher was telling one of the kids, "Now, if you fight, you are going to get grades in these aspects." And all the kids were silent. I was wondering, if after ten years the government makes it compulsory for every school to measure children in terms of social-emotional aspects, will they show as normal? Maybe this is not the right time to ask this question. Are we trying to judge them objectively? Do you think it is required?

Maya: I'll answer that along with Ganesh's. One, right at the beginning, we said ours was not going to be a prescriptive thing. It's something which could be informative, useful, and a set of guidelines for teachers.

Secondly, you can't have a framework if the teachers don't use it in the right way. Therefore the guidelines for teachers and the professional development of teachers are critical. Otherwise it will be like what has happened to CCE in our country.

Regarding the hypothesis, if we think that these are areas and competencies that we need to nurture in young people, then schools are perhaps the right places, keeping in mind that all homes may not be able to foster this – especially rural homes, children from illiterate homes and so on. So one hypothesis is that schools can foster this.

The second is that if teachers model it in a certain way, then the likelihood of their acquiring or developing these competencies is higher. And then maybe there's a certain issue, which Keerti also talked about, that in such a diverse country like India, can you really slot these things against a certain age? No, we can't, which is why we have age bands. And even those don't really matter. They are just indicative, in the same way as developmental milestones for children – what a baby is able to do at three months, at six months, etc. In the same way, these are possible indicators in terms of when schools intervene in a positive way, these are possible competencies young people can demonstrate in this affective domain, in these age bands. I think that's the only thing that I can say.

Margaret asked why we selected this. It's partly because our work in schools has been, for a long time, focusing on social-emotional learning because we've always found teachers very authoritarian. Teachers who are very nice people outside, are very, very authoritarian when they

come into the classroom, they talk down to children and so on. We've often wondered why those teachers have to be like that. Because when they are, children automatically either cringe and withdraw, or feel completely diffident.

We found that teachers' own self-esteem, self-confidence or social-emotional learning and competence has to be fostered, if we have to have them fostering children's competencies. That is perhaps the reason.

Margaret: Usually we hear about intellectual and skill development. Teachers talk about these. Is social-emotional development something for which there is a need in a school? Is it maybe the indiscipline or violence in a school which led us to think of the social and emotional development of the child? At the present time, it is an important need in all schools, for all children.

Maya: Absolutely. It is important because a lot of academic learning gets affected if…

Margaret: Academic violence, indiscipline, suicides – all of it is happening because of this.

Maya: You have answered your question.

Margaret: So is that the need you felt? It is an important aspect and it can begin even at three years of age.

Maya: Recently I was talking to Grade 12 students as a part of some of our work, and one child said, "Why shouldn't it be okay not to feel fine every day?" And that is true. I think the student – they were 17-plus – was very mature to say that there are certain days when I don't feel okay. That is an important comment.

Margaret: In my experience, when you work with the social and emotional development of the child, you find better children, better people and better learners.

Misbah: There was one question about what changes we made. We did two rounds. One was in a few of the categories of our schools. We looked at it in terms of the simplicity of the line items, the semantics, actually

being able to comprehend, especially with students. Were the younger ones able to understand the questions we developed for them? Was it a single idea? We didn't want line items which had multiple ideas. There were some of these even in the structure of the way we developed them, using Likert scales – three-point or five-point...

So there were some of the things we wanted to test and needed feedback on, because we looked at logistics as well as the overall structure of the questionnaire. We also did a few analyses to see if it was giving us what we were looking for. Then we had to go back and make a few changes, after going through the validity of the two.

Monila: The process was very thorough. After answering the questionnaire, the respondents waited and we actually took feedback from them – students, teachers, all of them. We consciously made it a point that they give us answers. So we changed the language and even changed the layout of the questionnaire as required. Many teachers said they had never come across this in their teaching experience.

Geeta: My point was that because parents were a strong component to be added and you didn't... I believe you did a lot of group discussions as well – with the children, or with the teachers? I thought maybe something came up in the group discussions that you probably added in the questionnaire later, or something like that?

Misbah: Not specifically from the group discussions, but from the responses from teachers and students. In the little bit of analysis that we did, a couple of questions, we felt, were not completely understood. So we had to re-word them, or change them, and maybe drop one or two that we felt were not giving us what we wanted. Those kinds of things.

Maya: Also, we did the group discussions as a separate exercise to get qualitative data versus the quantitative data we were getting from the questionnaire.

Misbah: It was from the same group – a sub-sect.

There was a question on consent forms from rural schools – the government schools. It was a challenge getting consent forms. So what we did was basically parcel consent where, like I said, we knew that we wanted a teacher from a particular section. We asked for students

also to come from that particular section. So we sent that section the consent forms and asked the schools to send them out to the parents. We didn't ask for them back, but wanted to at least inform parents that their children were going to be selected. And yes, of course, there were challenges in convincing the government schools, especially. But by and large, we managed to do that.

Maya: Also, somebody was asking about the initial analysis.

Misbah: Tools for analysis... We were looking at an equivalent to SPSS for the configurative, which is called PSPP. We were exploring a few tools for qualitative analysis – something like an ATLAS.ti, or even R, which is popularly used. We are right now getting into that stage of finalizing the tools.

Maya: Radhika's question about how objective it is… Actually, we have to find out. We've gathered the data, and because the sampling is quite high and across a huge geographical spread, we'll be able to figure out. Maybe it gets balanced out. I completely agree that we don't know how objective it can be. But of course, the questionnaires have been validated by psychologists and academic leaders and so on. So in that sense, we hope the teachers have been able to be as objective as possible. But it's still early days for us to answer that question.

At this point, this is a pilot study. So we are doing it across a wide population. Then maybe we will need to look at specifically residential schools – rural residential schools, urban residential schools, single-sex schools, boys' schools, girls' schools and so on. Right now we have tried to get a spread from across the country. We've looked at different boards also – state boards, ICSE (Indian Certificate of Secondary Education), CBSE…

Hardy: One or two small points. One of course is, why are we looking at socio-psychological and emotional descriptions as learning standards? I am trying to understand this, because what used to happen in good schools earlier was that the faculty would interact with students and describe what they thought was the kind of person that the child was. And that led to a very rich engagement with the child, and with the parents. People have asked this question in a different manner, but in terms of trying to make them learning standards, are we making some

kind of a problem which is bigger than what we are trying to do?

The second is about this chance comment from you about rural deprivation in socio-psychological development. Maybe I am wrong, but I think we should go back to the whole debate of Nai Taleem and modern education in this country, where one of the arguments that Hindustani Talimi Sangh very forcefully put forward is that modern education is the root of exploitation and produces people who are insensitive to others. That's why they talked about education which was of a different kind, which would not have any learning standards, even in terms of the other aspects.

So what I am trying to understand is, on the one hand you are saying that these aspects are very important. On the other hand, we are following techniques and methods which some people have said, whether they are right or wrong, is not the right direction to go.

The third point is this contradiction between violence and empathy. In life situations, violence and empathy go together, which is what I think Rohit was trying to say. The response to a particular situation can be very violent if you are very empathetic to some person. Does that then mean that the violence is still not justified? How does one put these outside the context – outside any particular life situation – and take a position on that, saying this child ranks 0.4 on violence? Maybe I am totally mistaken but I just want to understand, because that's how learning standards in socio-psychological emotional standards are going to be interpreted by general people. And then you will say you didn't mean it.

Shashi Mendiratta: Maya, your presentation was quite overwhelming. It has a lot of deep research and thinking in it. What I have to say is not a question, but a simple personal approach to this. How do we take all these words like resilience, empathy, sensitivity and all the other emotions, and make learning outcomes from there, or say at this stage or this age, this is what needs to be seen?

I think we need to just do the right thing by children – teach them how to be kind and affectionate and sharing, be good and kind to each other, and demonstrate that in our own behaviour and our own lives. And then let them be. Because emotions are a journey. What I am today, I may not be the same in a couple of years. My resilience would be different from yours. My empathy would be very different from all the people here in the room. How kind I am, or how warm I am, or how cold I am, how angry I get at what may be different from how angry someone gets at some

other thing. Sometimes anger is good, sometimes it is not.

So capturing it, I think, would be a wonderful thing. If you are able to pull it off, it would be wonderful to see how it happens. But capturing emotions so easily... I don't understand how you propose to do it. I feel that letting go, and letting each one grow at one's own pace is how it is.

Maya: To answer Hardy's question first, I don't know if we said anything about the people from rural places being deprived. We just said that we didn't take the parents because they wouldn't be able to handle and go through the questionnaire and so on. That was one.

The other thing you talked about was, why learning standards in this domain? Yes, you are right. They may say that you are 0.4 and so on. That's the danger, which is why we are providing this as a set of guidelines and framework for being able to recognize the social-emotional competencies children of six-eight years, nine-ten years, etc. would typically demonstrate if they are nurtured. So in that sense, a sensitive and learned teacher can hopefully recognize that, okay, this child doesn't seem to have this ability. We are not looking at assessing a child and giving him a score. That's not the intention at all. I want to underline that. And it's still early days, because we are only towards the end of our data collection. We haven't yet worked out our framework and guidelines based on that.

I completely agree, Shashi, that if there is a good teacher, a caring teacher, you don't need standards or anything. You just need somebody to teach the child with understanding, empathy, etc. Empathy is also being understood in different ways. But I think once the framework comes out and there are explanations of what we mean by empathy and the indicators of empathy demonstrated in positive or negative situations, I think those will be clear in the guidelines. We don't know how it's going to come out as yet. But I wouldn't worry about the fact that empathy can be positive or negative because I would say that we have to understand what people will collectively understand as empathy, the same way as people collectively understand what a smile could indicate, and so on. Similarly, when we define these competencies and these areas, people will hopefully understand them in the same way. It could be, as I said, somewhat dangerous territory, shark ridden territory. But that's how it is.

Why learning standards? Because I think social-emotional learning is gaining a lot more prominence, the same way as academic learning. And

a lot of research from various parts of the world is talking about how social-emotional competence leads to better critical thinking, higher order thinking skills and all that. Perhaps that's why.

Introducing New Partners

This is a series of short presentations from three of the newer organizations- Vasavi from Punarchith in Karnataka, Jalil from JMECT in Assam, and Prakash from Vidya Mytri in Koppal, also in Karnataka- who have become a part of the network in the last couple of years. They have spoken about their organizations and the work they do.

Punarchith is a collective that focuses on evolving alternative perspectives and activities related to education, environment, democracy, and society. It seeks pathways and perspectives to facilitate ideas and learning for an equitable and just society. A R VASAVI, who founded Punarchith, was a Professor of Social Anthropology at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore and a Senior Fellow of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. Her work appears in several academic journals and authored several books.

Jubayer Masud Educational Charitable Trust (JMECT) is an organization that works in the area of child education and community health in the rural areas of Bongaigaon, Assam. JMECT has been working to improve the education levels of children through the running of learning centres, early childhood care centres and education improvement programs in schools. ABDUL JALIL is a government-school teacher who founded JMECT in 2007 in the memory of his son who was kidnapped and killed on his way back from school one day.

Vidya Mytri, founded in 2015 in Koppal, Karnataka aims to work towards education of the children from vulnerable communities in a conducive environment so that they become agents of social change in their community and society. The basis of Vidya Mytri's work is the personal research of one of its founders, K T MARGARET, into how and what children learn, which is documented in her book, The Open Classroom. PRAKASH PATIL, co-founded the Vidya Mytri Trust. He has several years of experience working along with Margaret in early childhood education, primary education, running residential learning centres for slum children and so on in different parts of Karnataka.

PUNARCHITH

Vasavi: Basically, I am a footloose academic trying to have one more foot in so-called NGO work. I am part of a small, experimental collective called Punarchith. In Kannada, it means 'rethink'. We wanted to rethink many of our received ideas, including what we thought were privileges we had inherited, and to search or look for new ways of what we call learning, living and sharing.

Many of the ideas – and our sense of angst – came from working in rural India with two issues. One was agriculture and the other was elementary education. We felt that the agrarian distress that much of rural India has been experiencing since the past two decades is not only an economic deceleration of agriculture, but also a massive and intense disembedding of the rural world in which change is accelerated, and there is a lot of discontent.

In that context, we ask this question: In this fast disassembling rurality, how must rural youth be scaffolded? As you know, India has the largest body of youth in the world. It exceeds even China's. But you know that the education system is really not catering to their needs – especially to the needs of agrarian rural India. So that was the first question.

The second was in the context of agricultural livelihoods. How can we scaffold this? – because the education system itself, like the economy, is very, very anti-agriculture. So if you want to combine these, how can the new educational enterprise, or educational activities, link these to cater to agricultural learners?

And finally, we felt that instead of talking about education in the typical sense, our orientation would be that individual growth and collective responsibilities had to be held together.

So we started our flagship programme, which is called the Integrated

Learning Programme, or Samagraha Kalike Karyakrama. I want to acknowledge the WATIS team for stepping in and supporting this component these past two years.

We are based in a village which is about 72 km from Mysore, about 210 km from Bangalore, in the Chamrajnagar district. We have finished three cycles of this integrated six-month course. It's not residential, although we would like it to be. The youth come to us for about 70 days of contact. Right now, most of them come from the Chamrajnagar district. In the previous batch, we had some from the nearby Mysore and Mandya districts also.

The youth – both girls and boys – are between 18 and 24, primarily SCs and STs (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes). We take even those who have failed 10th standard, because we know that there is a large body of youth who do fail that or PUC and so on.

This is what our approach has been...

Place-based learning: Not using standard textbooks at all. The place in which they live, their own village and society, becomes the text and we draw lessons from that.

Social transformative learning: Again, used a lot in alternative learning to look at how learning must enable you to have a personal transformation in your life and also in the society – the family, especially – of which you are a part.

Critical thinking: To critique, think and rethink all received ideas, whether about personhood, family norms or culture, and also about mainstream issues – for example, religion, etc.

Integrated knowledge: Most of us in the collective are from academic backgrounds and we felt very strongly about questioning disciplinary boundaries. The trend is towards disciplinary ideas – not really having classes in terms of disciplines, but more in terms of themes and issues, how we integrate the disciplines into disseminating the issues.

Very roughly, this is the core course content. It is divided into four components – livelihoods, foundational knowledge, personal growth and general skills. I will go through some of these. We are still struggling with much of this. It sounds very easy, but in actual practice it has been very challenging.

All youth in India, I think, are burdened with tremendous disadvantages, much of which they have internalized. These include ideas of leaving the village – the feeling that it's not worth it in the village, that agriculture is a losing proposition and they must go out and get a job.

With that is the imprint of the mainstream education system mentioned earlier – rote learning, non-questioning, a culture of silence, the good student is the submissive student, etc.

We found, especially after the first cycle in which we had only eight students, that addressing this culture of silence and what we call the imprint of mainstream education was more important. That had to be the foundation before we did anything else. The process of unlearning is something we are not completely successful with, and are still struggling with. How do you do this unlearning? For example, when you read a text, you don't memorize. You ask questions. More than answering, you read or know, and ask questions back.

Questioning – not only a text, but people – and the ability to speak, etc. became very central. So we spend a lot of time on this. Especially in the first four weeks, there are a lot of activities where they not only think about themselves, but communicate through songs and dance and plays. They play lots of small games that enable them to recognize their voice, their ability to think independently. That forms one of the key challenges we've had.

Our key programme is Integrated Agriculture. Vasu is our main resource person. He is very well-known here in Karnataka and is called 'Soil Vasu' because he works with soil. It is 'integrated agriculture' because it is not just sustainable or organic. It integrates not only multi-crops, but also animal husbandry and, very strongly, ecological restoration of degraded land. We work in a dry area where the water table has fallen very low – about 800 metres or so – and is in rain shadow. So we practise restoration agriculture with organic agriculture. And it isn't only agriculture. It has ecology when we talk about integration. Later, when it comes to accounts they do things like: How do you weigh seeds? How do you measure seeds?' How do you keep accounts of inputs and outputs?

There were many things that were shocking to us. For example, we found that in none of the homes of these youths do they keep accounts. They don't even know how much their annual income is and how much has gone out. They don't even keep accounts of their indebtedness or the interest rate. Many of them – some of them have completed pre-university – don't know how to do simple interest calculations. So we also add these components.

In our classes, we tell our resource persons that no direct transaction, in the sense of a lecture mode, can be for more than 15 minutes. The

attention span is only about 12-15 minutes. So they go on to a lot of activities. In a session on gender you would have a young boy actually wearing a sari. So they have reverse role play.

Very early on we emphasize that in this course there are no exams, no pass and fail. The students keep a portfolio of their actual work, and there is a lot of error analysis when we give them feedback. It's a process of learning. So they have to redo all their papers. Even if they have made one small mistake, they have to redo it, show it to us, get it corrected and put it back into the file. Every month, they review that portfolio with us, and among themselves, to see what they have learnt and understood.

For the first batch, we used Yuva English from Pune, but it really didn't help. So we switched over to texts created from their own lives, in English. Again a strong imprint of mainstream media, we found they had difficulty in moving from the specific to the general, being able to generalize. Also, as part of General Skills, we have very little of Computers – just an introduction, so they at least know how to use the net and search for information like the meteorological department's announcements about rainfall, or prices, etc.

English and Accounts are under General Skills. But we found that English was very, very difficult for them because they don't come from the culture or environment of English. When we used Yuva English – a very good package – we spent more than almost a hundred hours on it. But still the capabilities were very limited at the end of it. So we switched over.

We face many, many challenges after these three cycles we've had. One is to legitimize agriculture. There is such a strong emphasis and pressure on them to get out of agriculture that many of them have come to this course because we give them a stipend, which is the daily average wage of Rs 200. Later there is pressure on them to use our certificate to get urban jobs. There are trains from Bangalore to Chamrajnagar at least four-five times a day. A large number of youth are just piling into this train and leaving the villages.

If they do agriculture, parents want it to be non-organic. All of you know that across the country there is dumping of pesticides and fertilizers, using hybrid seeds – including now, of course, the trend to use GM seeds. So getting them back into sustainable integrated agriculture and retaining the youth in agriculture continues to be difficult.

We found that just having the course was really not effective. After the course, we formed an alumni network. They meet at least once in six

weeks where they exchange information on what they are doing. Some of the youth have already reclaimed their land. The average land holding was only about two-and-a-half acres. Some of them have reclaimed land from leases that their parents had given to others. And we find that since labour is expensive, they exchange labour amongst themselves. They form a collective and move from one person's village or farm to the other, helping each other, especially during sowing and harvesting. So the alumni network is a very important component.

Again, negotiating cultural priorities... There are tremendous negative cultural trends. For example, the village we live in is a mixed caste and religion village. The older generations of Muslims, Hindus and Christians had very good relationships. But now the Muslims are increasingly marginalized, and there are very strong anti-Muslim sentiments. Also, among girls, early marriage continues – marriage with dowry.

There are other things too. For example, there is pressure on one of our brightest boys to become a godman, because in that caste one boy is selected to be one, and there are some rituals associated with that.

So how do we contest these things alongside the course, and at the same time not take on or antagonize the village or the parents? How do we negotiate girls against early and forced marriages? This is a challenge we continue to face.

Finally, how do we integrate this into the educational system? Because it is post-school, and not in the college system, we've had trouble. We've talked to the Education Department but really made no headway. This is one of our big drawbacks.

I want to leave you with some comments. In the course, we get a lot of feedback – written feedback – and here are things some of the learners have shared with us: "I came here with hesitation but now I am sad that the course is getting over." "Instead of learning from textbooks, I have learnt how to deal with my own life." "This course has enabled me to be recognized as a responsible person and my family has allocated land to me." This is what really has been heartening for us. It's a very small group, but the changes in some – not all – of their lives have been very, very significant.

JUBAYER MASUD EDUCATIONAL CHARITABLE TRUST

Abdul Jalil: Jubayer Masud Educational and Charitable Trust(JMECT) was set-up in the memory of a child named Jubayer Masud, who was a student of Class 3. One day, on his way back from school, he was kidnapped and killed.

When we formed this Trust, we dreamt that society should be such that only peace and tranquillity prevailed – a classless society, with no lower class, middle class or upper class. The only class should be humanity. That was our dream.

JMECT works is a very difficult region, where floods are a regular occurrence for two-three months a year. Apart from that, there is also the issue of erosion. A village can move from this bank to that bank and back again, because of the movement of the river. This is the problem of being located by the riverside, and this is where we work.

Literacy and irrigation are major problems. The literacy rate is only 48 per cent and education is at an all-time low. Besides, there is the problem of livelihoods. People migrate from there to all over India in search of work. They come to Bangalore too, and to Delhi and Rajasthan.

Floods and erosion also make communication and road connectivity a problem. Roads are bad or non-existent. Other communication modes like the internet do not work and mobile towers are not always functional. There are health issues, too, with children and women suffering from all kinds of diseases.

Among our activities is the running of our learning centre. It consists of two schools, apart from which there is a remedial coaching centre which runs after school hours, a pull-out centre which runs during school hours and also provides remedial coaching, and a centre for the pre-primary level. This is how we work in education.

We also work with disaster management. Every year, during floods we do some amount of relief work. In terms of development, so far we have only focused on irrigation. In the days ahead, we plan to start working on livelihoods as well as on health issues.

I have already mentioned the challenges we face. Among our opportunities are the availability of working areas and human resource. Our team works with a lot of dedication. The management board cooperates with us and helps where it can, and the community also

supports the work we do.

VIDYA MYTRI

Prakash: I am doing this presentation on behalf of the Vidya Mytri Trust. I will explain in detail when and how this trust was formed, why and for whom it works, the methodology it uses and the programmes it has done.

The Vidya Mytri Trust was started in October 2002, and operates in the Tavaragere village in the Koppal district of North Karnataka. Our aim is to educate children from marginalized and vulnerable communities so that they can become instruments of social change. At present, we are working primarily with children from Devadasi families. Devadasis are essentially untouchables – they are treated as such. Children from that community, like most people of that class, suffer from low self-esteem. The reason they have a low image of themselves is that in spite of having talents they do not know how to use them, or to think for themselves. Our aim is to educate them and to bring out those talents which would otherwise be wasted in society. So with our founder, K T Margaret's support, we embarked on this project.

The methodology we use in our classes is from a book called Open Classroom by our founder. The main focus is to remove emotional blocks that hamper the learning process. We use specially designed activities that help children overcome these blocks, and thereby support their entry into the process of academic learning.

Among our programmes is the Residential Learning Centre for children who are six and above, a day school for children aged three to five, a government school support programme, and documentation of educational materials.

The aim of the Residential Learning Centre is personality development of the child, which is our main focus. Within that, we try to support factors that will lead to the child having a stable life in future. How we do this is by encouraging children to talk freely with their teachers, discuss their feelings and problems. The behaviour of each child is observed keenly. Individual and group interactions as well as role play are used to help a child rethink and reconstruct behaviour with our support.

At present, we have 17 children – eight girls and nine boys – studying in Standards 1-8. In future, we hope to have 30. More than that will make it difficult to observe each child individually and give feedback. We also

hope that these children, groomed by our methodology, can then go out and become harbingers of change in their society, community and village. Hopefully, they will also be able to draw other children into this process of social change.

In the day school, we support children to overcome their emotional blocks through a number of activities. That, in turn, leads to ease in academic learning. The classes are held between 9 am and 5 pm. Children here are under six years of age. Once they turn six, they either come to the Residential Learning Centre or attend the government school from their homes. The choice is theirs.

Children who come to the Residential Learning Centre are those seeking change in their lives. They come from the Pampanagar colony in Tavaragere. The colony has 109 families and 150 children. About 70-80 children came to us off and on but only 17 chose to stay on. These were the 17 that stepped out of the community to come and stay with us so that once they went out into the world they could contribute to the process of social change.

Not all children are open to change. One section feels that we live in a society, and will live our lives the way our parents live theirs. Another group feels that this is the way our society lives, but there is a bigger society outside with very different norms, and we have to change if we want to go there and fit in. These are the children who come to us.

We need support to continue our work. The challenge is resources, teachers. If other youth like me, who believe that these children need to change to a better life, come forward to work with us, we can reach out to more children by starting more centres. But finding such motivated people seems to be a problem. I understand that young people have their own goals for their future, but if anybody wishes to they are most welcome to join our Trust.

I will now explain how we conduct the government school supportive programme. In the first government school I went to, the teachers were all in the staff room discussing their personal issues, and the children were in the classrooms. My first thought was, "How will I work in such a place?" I came back and shared my concern with my colleagues, who suggested that I go back to the teachers and talk to them.

I am interested in the process of education. So when I returned to the school and spoke to the teachers, I found that they had the talent, the qualification and the knowledge of how to teach children, but had no idea how to move or engage with the children. At their request, I started

taking classes three days a week. Classes 1 and 2 were combined into a single class, and the same with Classes 3 and 4.

So I went into these classes hoping to work alongside the teachers. How would the teachers be motivated if I were to teach on my own? The main change would have to come from the teachers themselves. If they were present in the classroom, they could observe first-hand how I taught and the response to my methods, and implement whatever changes they needed to in their own teaching. Initially, they would leave the room saying, "You teach the class, Sir. I will be outside." It made me wonder if I was doing the right thing. Here I was, teaching a class while the designated teacher was outside.

I spoke to the headmaster about the teachers' non-cooperative attitude. I stopped going to the school for two-three days. Then I got a call from the headmaster requesting me to return, and assuring me that the teachers would be present while I taught the class.

I used the Vidya Mytri methodology on the children. It eased communication and thereby their learning. The teachers were awed – they had never thought of teaching in this way. In a couple of months, all the flash cards and other teaching aids that had been gathering dust so far were pulled out and used in the classrooms. Now the teachers are able to proudly claim that children from the 2nd Standard can recite their multiplication tables up to 30. I don't know how they used the methodology. But once they took interest in teaching, results followed.

By helping one teacher, one can impact the learning of several children. That is why I work with them. Also, the Cluster Resource Centre person who saw the positive change in the government teachers of the classes I taught, has requested me to teach in all the eight schools in the cluster. I am yet to decide whether to take up the offer.

Under our documentation enterprise, we have prepared a teachers' manual for young children in the age group of three to five years. We have sent it to Orient Blackswan for publication. The next phase involves the preparing of lesson plans and teaching materials – workbooks and teaching aids. Once they are ready, they can be easily shared with everybody.

Q&A

Kanupriya: I have a question for Vasavi. Your work is really inspiring, and one can imagine that it's a difficult group to work with. My question is related to that. Some of it you mentioned. With that age group, even in the cities – I've worked with disadvantaged children in the 18-24 age group – it's really difficult to get them to commit to anything. The question is always "What's in it for me?" or "What do I get out of it?" and "Why do I need to do this?" So they are constantly looking for a quick way out. It's this culture of consumerism and misplaced aspirations almost – how do you deal with that? How do you get them to stay the whole 70 days? And what are your challenges in that space?

Preeti: My question is also for Vasavi. When you started working in this area, did you only come across youth who have some kind of land in their families' possession? Or were there also youth from families who didn't have any land to go back to and work on? What was the different approach for them?

The other thing is that this kind of a change also needs a lot of help from the community, the parents and panchayats. What was your process of engaging with these other people – and more significantly, their own parents, because they also try to put in their own ideas of how they should succeed and what they should do with their lives?

Amit: What were your concerns when you started the programme for youth? Why did you start that?

Vasavi: Shall I start with the last? As I mentioned, with all our field work and the research we are doing in rural areas, we saw how this, what we call disembedding of rural society, was affecting the youth. So on one hand, in rural societies, their families are telling them to get out. But the education system and the general system do not enable them, even if they have a Bachelors' degree. Many are here. Mysore is just 72 km away, and they have this flourishing correspondence course. Degrees are just given – literally, given. Many of them have MAs – we know there is this degree inflation – but they don't have jobs. And with these so-called booming cities around Mysore, many of the so-called graduates have actually come there but don't make it through because they don't know

English.

So the markers of disadvantage from the family or community are strong, and the markers of a poor educational system is what they embody – they literally embody it because, as we documented, their body language shows it. But there is also, as you said, the media and certain kinds of aspirations. We also found that many of these students are now getting mobilized into negative groups – fundamentalism and so on. In this district itself, the tensions are between two caste groups, more than Muslims and Hindus. A lot of the Dalits are in very violent kinds of groups. The Dalit Sangharsh Samiti has now become the Dalit Sena, as you might know, espousing violence. Those are really some of the trends.

While we worked for several years – some of my friends here know that we worked in elementary education – we find that the teachers who come to the so-called teaching pool also have these disadvantages, because as youth, they have been impacted by all these negative trends. So how do you scaffold them for some of the challenges?

We noticed that unless we did much more of personality oriented activities and psychological empowerment and recognition, all learning was just a waste. So we spend a lot of time on that. I could give you several examples. You asked about the community? From the beginning, we took the decision that when we have any programmes, we won't have VIPs coming in. So when the course is inaugurated, we have a little floral ceremony. We don't have prayers or anything religious. The parents are invited, and all the community members. In the village where we stay, we have an advisory group which has all the local leaders. The caste and religious leaders are very neatly divided, and the panchayat is very strong. We have told them what we do and we share all our plans with them. So they all come on the inaugural day. Midway through the course, there is an Open Day, when the vegetable seeds from the home gardening they do are harvested. The community comes then too, and share all that.

We found that most of the problems in the community were because many are smallholders, again an all-India trend. Smallholders are now leasing their land out to larger landholders because they have more capital and technology with them. Many of the students wanted to reclaim their land, and there were these tensions.

So we had a meeting with all the parents who had leased out their land. We looked at the economics... Okay, you leased out your land only for Rs 15,000 per year. After three years, it is devastated with pesticides. The bugs can be removed. But your cost in recovering that land is much

more. So why don't you give it to your child?

One of the so-called successes, we think, is that six of the boys across these villages have actually reclaimed their land. We do have learners – especially STs (Scheduled Tribes) – who don't have land at all. So what we do is to ask part of the alumni network to lease out land, in which they get some kind of support. But they have to do it through the collective system, not individually.

Especially in the first two batches we had this issue of boys, especially, who wanted to get out during certain seasons. For example, we are very close to Tamil Nadu where there are towns like Tirupur that have peak times for their textile industry when they want youth labour. These boys wanted to go there, earn Rs 500 a day and come back. So we are very strict about attendance. If, of these 70 days, they miss more than 20 per cent in the first segment, we drop them. In the current batch, we have actually dropped several people.

Many of them, in their feedback, said that they were at first reluctant to come – they came because of the money, thinking it was going to be all digging and working in the hot sun. Once they learn that it's fun and not just agriculture, we give them little plots and they pair up and actually work on them. There is a lot of recognition. Outsiders – all our friends from Bangalore and Mysore – come and see and praise them.

After that initial period, once they settle in, then the attendance is steady. Afterwards, they actually don't want to go. We've found in all the three courses that once the course closes – there's a formal ceremony, when they do a play – for the next ten days, they are just hanging around. They just want to be there, for a sense of assurance.

So it is the initial hesitation – this marker of "I will fail", and the other kinds of attractions – which we have to work with. The other thing we have found, especially after the first batch, is that it is very wrong of us to say that because they are rural they must stay rural. There are some who are just outstandingly talented. There is a girl who lives in a hut with one bulb, and has topped the class in BSc. We asked her to enrol for MSc, and now she is preparing for the MSc exams in Mysore University.

Another tribal boy has artistic skills, and is also a good worker. So those who we think have other skills and orientation, we facilitate their moving on into any kind of profession, but with the idea that they are part of this collective. They come back and help. For example, two boys from very, very poor families, now work in resorts. There are two-three resorts in the area because of the forest. But every month, these boys

come back for the network meeting and help in other ways.

We found that it was too much of a burden on us to say, "We've done all this, so you must stay back and reclaim your land." We let them go, especially girls. They get married, and parents completely close them in, as do husbands. They are not allowed to go into the fields. Somewhere we try to negotiate. For example, to two of the girls we have said, "If you are not allowed to go into the fields, you can do home gardening, which is a very strong component in our course. You are gardening not only for your food sovereignty – your independence – but also for your nutrition, so that you start eating local foodgrains, etc." Some of it we compromise with. When they go, we have to just let go.

Vijay Parmar: My question is for Vidya Mytri Trust. When the children go to mainstream schools, do they also face the stigma that they are Devadasi children? Is it something that you are addressing – how to send these children to mainstream schools and sensitize the teachers to deal with this, so that the children are properly included into the school system?

Prakash: Earlier, about five-six years ago, it was a problem. But now children in government schools are not treated that way. In our observations, we found that children themselves, if they were from the lower castes, suffered from a sense of inferiority with respect to other children.

Vijay Parmar: That inferiority complex doesn't come on its own. It comes from how the others behave with them.

Prakash: That is why, at the Residential Learning Centre, we try and build their self-confidence, so that they can cope with stepping out of their own community.

Avinash: Vasavi, based on your responses now, it seems that – whether it was by design or default that it has happened – it is mostly the male youth who are not doing all that well, academically or in other fields, on whom the burden of agriculture has fallen, even if it was not planned.

I was trying to link it to this: In the school education space, when you go and work in tribal areas, and you say that your language is the one that needs to be strengthened further, we will work on that and so

on, the response is, fine, you do that, but we also want English. It's not a perfect analogy. But in a sense, the children may want to do what you tell them but may also want a say in what they finally do. In this case, it seems that for that particular group, there aren't really too many options but to work in the fields. That thought is slightly discomfiting, so to say.

Vasavi: That does sort of fall on these youth who have not performed academically well. But the other option that you see – and what we have documented as well in other parts of India – is that these are the youth who are being pushed into the lower urban economy with all the insecurities and problems. So instead, if they have this option of reclaiming their land and getting a better sense of belonging, that probably supports them long-term. At least what we are documenting now is that they actually mature into much more stable persons.

S C Behar: Jalil, what you said about peace is very important. Our educational documents like the National Curriculum Framework also state that peace education will be given. However, we don't see that happening. It was not very clear from your presentation as to what steps you have taken to impart peace education. I realize it is in the early stages yet. I am not asking whether you have been able to do something in that direction, or plan to do something. But do you have any ideas on how you will do this peace education? And how will this link with your dreams?

Jalil: If you provide children with value and moral education, peace is bound to follow. That is why we target children.

S C Behar: I understand that. But how will you teach peace? With violence all around, how will you convince children about how wonderful peace is and what they need to do to achieve it? What are the difficulties you foresee in teaching peace amidst all the violence? How will the children be inclined towards peace? That is what I want to know.

Jalil: I tell the children stories about morality. I tell them the teachings of great religious leaders. These are some of the ways in which I try to give the children moral and value education.

S C Behar: Actually, I was asking you this for a different reason. At the insistence of some people, I have drawn up a project for a university in

that area. And what keeps coming up is that the area is violence prone. The whole of Assam, as you know, is under the threat of violence. And then there is this erosion – getting cut off or displaced at regular intervals – which makes livelihoods difficult. So the university has to be such that it operates keeping all these factors in consideration, unlike in other places where you build a university, you start courses and you are done. This is the context.

There is another thing I want to ask you. Have you noticed that the erosion also makes it difficult to grow crops? Anything you grow gets submerged in the floods. These are problems you cannot solve. But in your education plans, how do you propose to involve these factors and prepare the community for these challenges?

Vidya: How you keep your learning centre operational during floods, when people are displaced.

Jalil: The learning centres are closed down during floods. You are aware of the situation in Assam. Sometimes floods continue for 15 days at a stretch. Roads are non-navigable and are sometimes closed for up to a month. We stay closed until all that is fixed.

Vidya: And do the same children come back?

Jalil: Yes, they do. When the centre reopens, they return.

S C Behar: Some observations on the other two... You could respond, or need not.

Your work, Vasavi, is really remarkable. Of course, it is experimental. Ever since the Radhakrishnan Commission report and the Kothari Commission report, the model that requires to be developed is where you are, in a way, wanting certain elements of modernity yet struggling against it in some other elements. They always have been talking about modern failures and Indian wisdom, culture, etc. I am not going into details.

I am saying, in that sense, it is a great experiment because you are dealing with both, in a way. So I think you will have lots of lessons to learn if it goes ahead. Also, I presume you have that, but if you have a larger perspective of if it succeeds and goes ahead, then these are the kinds of things we will all do, so that this kind of a model can work. That

was my ambition – or greed!

Yours, Prakash, is really very interesting. In many areas, government schools openly permit others to come and help. But in many areas, it is very difficult. You have to get all kinds of permission. You are indicating – even Eklavya is doing something different – a way in which you are running a centre which shows how the boys and girls are doing better. Therefore you are getting access not only to the school, but through that to the whole cluster. I think it is again a very interesting approach that we have learnt, and I presume that many others may be doing it too.

So I congratulate all three of you. They are very good experiments.

Organization Development– Experiences & Insights

The following sessions have presentations from four organizations that also happen to be some of the longstanding WATIS partners – Vidya Bhawan, Vikramshila, EZ Vidya and Eklavya. They have shared their insights on organizational development aspects. So it is looking back, reflecting on their own growth and trajectories, and sharing some experiences from there.

These sessions are followed by a moderated open discussion on what organization development in the social/non-profit sector entails, what challenges are faced and so on.

Vidya Bhawan Society, Udaipur, established the Vidya Bhawan Education Resource Center (VBERC) in 1995 with the objective of cross-fertilization of ideas on pedagogy and sharing of experiences within Vidya Bhawan institutions and between Vidya Bhawan and outside institutions. Gradually VBERC established itself nationally as a resource centre that works on the issues of school education. PRASOON KUMAR is Director, Vidya Bhawan Society and has been responsible for the VBERC. He has worked in the field of education for over 17 years with schools, government and private institutions across many states.

Vikramshila is a Kolkata based resource organisation founded in 1989 that works in the field of elementary education in India and advocates actively on the issues of quality and equity. They also run an experimental school for children from marginalized communities in a village called Bigha, in Burdwan district of West Bengal. SHUBRA CHATTERJEE is one of the founders of Vikramshila and has been the Director of the organization since 1993.

EZ Vidya (now Chrysalis), started in 2001, is an organization that focuses on delivering quality holistic education in Indian schools and aims to address some of the challenges in the education system through a tool called Chrysalis Thinkroom which helps children, parents and the teachers with a curriculum that is both innovative as well as interactive. BALASUBRAMANIAM (Bala) is Head, Educational Partnerships and Ganesh Subramanian is Director, at EZ Vidya.

Setup in 1982 to implement the landmark Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP), Eklavya is an organisation that develops and field-tests innovative educational programmes and trains resource people to implement these programmes. Eklavya has, over the years, engaged with the school education system in various States on curriculum and textbook development and teacher professional development and capacity building of various educational functionaries in the governmental and non-governmental space. ANAJALI NORONHA and NEELESH MALVIYA have been with Eklavya for over two decades.

VIDYA BHAWAN

Prasoon: I have been working in the Vidya Bhawan Resource Centre (VBERC) for the last 18 years, along with Hardy. He was a kind of a mentor. Vidya Bhawan started in 1995, and the Resource Centre is part of the larger group of 13 Vidya Bhawan institutions. Perhaps it started much earlier because in 1995 we got our first assignment, to make schools work with the community. Vidya Bhawan is our strength and also our weakness – as the presentation unfolds, you will see why.

Vidya Bhawan was a grant-in-aid institution. For many years before the Resource Centre was started, it was an inward looking organization, which was made to work like a government organization. There was no platform for any exchange of new ideas on education or learning. Nor was there any space for talking about what Vidya Bhawan had done in schools. When I look back, I realise that the first important feature was to make it more outward looking.

How to add value to the existing Vidya Bhawan mandate of working for responsible citizenship and create a national level resource agency for innovative intervention in school education, how to promote and evolve the discourse on education and its practices at all levels, were some of the initial questions we were trying to address.

When you are a grant-in-aid institution, you get resources only for doing the tasks assigned to you. For creating a platform for people to interact, we would need resources, so we started generating that. We established a small library which had all kinds of publications in different subjects, which was useful for referencing when we were working with people on textbooks. We started at a time when the internet was not so popular. We got books from many organizations, like Eklavya, which worked on education and learning in different subjects.

We also realized that by working only with Vidya Bhawan we wouldn't be able to change much. There was an internal challenge because the Vidya Bhawan institutions – the Teachers' Training College and schools – were all part of a larger structure. The question that came up for all of us was, how do you change the larger discourse around? One of the things we did for this was to work with Lok Jumbish, creating textbooks for their science training programme, which preceded DPEP (District Primary Education Programme). We also worked on some research in NFE (non-formal education) with MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and on developing NFE curriculums.

So for us it was a journey from helping Vidya Bhawan institutions to get out of being inward looking, and then taking on the larger challenge of school education – non-formal, elementary and so on. And now the task for us is, how do we address challenges in high school for teaching mathematics, science, language and so on? There is a lot of expectation from us which we are trying to handle, to create structures that can meet these challenges.

This is how we have organized ourselves:

- Core internal team
- Subject teams
- Mentoring by senior resource persons (internal and external)
- Support from the larger faculty of Vidya Bhawan and a spectrum of institutions consisting of
    - schools and higher education
    - teacher education and educational research
    - liberal arts and science graduate education
    - technical education
    - agricultural research and education
    - environmental education
    - research and training institutions

This is a representation and also our wish that we want to organize ourselves! Some of it is there and the rest we are trying to put in place.

In our engagements it is important for us to create space, which we struggle to keep. We move in and out. Sometimes there is nothing to do – we just have to sit and cool our heels. This may have happened many times in many places, and perhaps this is how the government structure works. We've also realized that with the government there is no final

word. The government is not a hegemony in itself. Within governments, there are many opinions, and you have to keep interacting with those. Some will not agree with you, some will. So if you want to keep your space occupied – or expand – you have to keep interacting with them even if you are not working with them. You also have to sometimes put up with being made to feel that you are not wanted. But if you work with the government structure, we've learnt that this is how it is.

The Vidya Bhawan School is perhaps an example of a common school. So it is a challenge for us to ensure that children who even though they are not able to score good marks, after 12 years of schooling they feel that they are socially productive. Getting teachers and the community out of this mindset that not all children who are in the school will get a white-collar job is another issue. Our school has many children who have been weeded out of elite schools in Udaipur. So a lot of negotiation has to be done with the teachers so they understand that these children are also important, and you need to work with them.

We have to work on retaining our team. They get a lot of liberating offers from outside Vidya Bhawan. We have to accommodate people and their needs and aspirations. It sometimes becomes difficult because you are a part of a larger structure governed by rules – you can't move beyond that.

We have to look towards getting funds for Vidya Bhawan institutions apart from the Resource Centre. We had a serious problem in internal resource mobilization. For example, our schools run at 60 per cent capacity. So we need to improve our school, get more children in. We realized it's not that children don't come to school, but more children leave us than get enrolled. So we have to look internally – how we interact with teachers, how the teachers interact with the children, and what are the aspirations of the community. All of this is there on our agenda.

Presently, Vidya Bhawan is also undergoing a leadership change. We have a new president and new executive members. Since 2011, we have no longer been a grant-in-aid institution. We have a huge campus of 300 acres that we have to maintain. We have 400 employees, around 2,000 children in school, and around 1,400-1,500 students in postgraduate college. Grant-in-aid gave independence, but sustaining ourselves is a big challenge.

There is a change in the constitution and we will soon have a new chief executive. Our old executive committee and governing council have their own questions. Because all of us come with ten years of experience,

of knowing schools, we also come with lots of questions. And when you are the alumnus of your own school, then you think that you have a better entitlement – a permanent entitlement – than those who have come from outside. All these questions are there and we have to deal with them. But we are not fired for responding to them. So we do have that space.

Our core components are children, schools, teachers, community, government, NGOs and corporate initiatives. In our work, we try to understand how children learn, how they fail, and the role of the school. We try to get teachers to forget how they have learnt, and make them understand that not all children need to take competitive exams.

When working with the government, there are certain hierarchies and protocols. From corporates, we have learnt how to organize ourselves, how to plan and how to look at our outcomes. At times we struggle to look beyond the managerial structures, to see that not all programme outputs can be driven by these. We come up with suggestions for many CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) programmes with which we work across different locations, in a manner that their understanding of looking at education and learning also changes.

VIKRAMSHILA

Shubhra Chatterji: Ever since I saw this schedule, I have been thinking about what organizational development (OD) is. Theories are in abundance, but what is perhaps needed is to be able to mould them to suit the context specific needs of an organization. My understanding of the OD process has grown more out of practice over the years – hardcore survival, rather than these theories. We have also had the privilege of nurturing some small organizations. Working with them has been an enriching experience in terms of knowing and understanding how organizations come to be, how they grow and how they respond to crises. When it is happening to you, you don't get time to reflect. You are just caught in fire-fighting. But when you get the chance to observe some other organization and perhaps be able to walk with them, then you really get to understand more about organizations and how they operate.

As we all know, OD exercises are undertaken to strengthen organizational effectiveness. So how does it work for NGOs? How do we measure our effectiveness or impact? We are social organizations. Our

impact or effectiveness cannot be assessed in monetary terms. You will all agree that at the heart of every social organization is a vision and a core set of values. And for us, social values take precedence over financial growth.

So what should we attempt to do when we undertake OD exercises? How do we define effectiveness? I think we have to focus on the core values that are at the foundation of the work we do. We have to nurture the people who are there by creating an environment where people feel valued and seek continual learning and improvement. This helps to increase the energy level of people, and in turn, helps to improve effectiveness. This is what my personal learning has been.

To get the total commitment of people, I think it is important for an organization to practise internally – in its organization culture – what it preaches externally. If I am preaching secularism or democracy, I have to practise it internally. We have to walk our talk – not just the person at the head but all the people in the organization have to do that. Together.

The key word here is alignment. I think this is what OD exercises are meant to do – align the mission, vision and values to the programmes or structures or systems. Often, when there is a misalignment, we see something going fundamentally wrong with the organization. These exercises can be done with external experts, but also internally through a process of structured reflection initiated by the head of the organization or the governing body. What I mean is that OD cannot be a one-off thing where you do it once, call in some specialists, and it goes on. No, it is an ongoing process, because an organization is not static, but a living, growing entity.

An organizational identity, I think you will all agree, is central to any organization. And it is the mission or vision that establishes this identity. In fact, it is the very reason for our existence, and drives everything we do. One simple question that has helped us stay aligned to our mission is to keep asking ourselves why we are doing what we are – because sometimes you get tempted by funds and such things – and whether we are close to our mission, or getting diverted or diffused by illusions of success.

OD exercises help to build clarity and consensus among team members. This becomes vital at a time when the organization is experiencing a sharp spurt of growth. It is difficult to take time off to reflect at a time when a great deal of fire-fighting is going on. But since these exercises are meant to bind people, processes and policies together, it is also very

important to find the time to do it or else there is a great chance that things will go off track.

Last year, we celebrated 25 years of our organization, and did some looking back. I came across a very interesting article – Paul C Light's description of five landings. I often use that lens not only to understand my own organization, but other organizations as well. It is an interesting matrix for this kind of reflection. According to this, the first stage of an organization is when it is formed, and the goal at that time is to make its presence felt. I could relate very well with the given description. At that time, we too had no formal structure. There was just a handful of people, no proper office, no systems or structures in place. But it was characterized by a high degree of motivation, energy, enthusiasm, conviction and, if I may add, a kind of innocence. The main struggle at this stage was to gain visibility to establish ourselves as an organization.

Then came the second stage, and the goal was to expand. We grew in terms of work, and were struggling to cope with the expansion. Some structure and systems were in place, but still quite rudimentary and ad hoc, mostly driven by project needs and at times by donors, which could be a problem. But the good thing was that we were on a steep learning curve, learning from getting involved in different kinds of work. And whenever at the crossroads, we asked ourselves the most important question: Why are we doing what we are doing? This helped us to remain authentic and aligned in the midst of expansion. This is, I think, is the most important stage, when organizations can get side-tracked.

Sometime in the last few years, we took baby steps to reach the next stage – the third landing. This is the stage where we started consciously investing in systems and structures. Earlier, donors would ask us to do certain things but we wouldn't do them. They seemed meaningless, the work more important. Now it became a felt need. We realized that, as an organization, we would fall apart if we did not pay attention to this. Structures and systems are needed for efficiency. We also started realizing the importance of remaining focused and not trying to do too many things. As newer people joined us, the challenge was to have everyone aligned to our core objectives and values.

This is also the stage where organizations fall into the trap of complacency. And once this sets in, there is the danger of stagnation and mechanization seeping in. Organizations go up and down. You can be on the fifth landing and sometimes slip back to the second. As they do this, they should remember that the size of the budget is not as important

as maintaining alignment with organizational values and programmes, keeping the conviction and energy intact. This is the struggle – the conviction and energy of the early years, and the experience of the later years.

We came into existence in the late 80s, when there was a change in nomenclature. From 'voluntary agencies', we came to be known as NGOs (non-governmental organizations). There was a change in perception as NGOs started being seen as 'professionals' in the development sector. Now, in 2016, with the private sector coming in as a player through its CSR activities, and the rise of a new kind of social entity who call themselves 'for-profit' social organizations, the lines are getting blurred and expectations are also changing.

I often have to face questions. What is your operating income? In lieu of profit... All these are corporate terms. What is your strategic plan? When we have no idea how the next two years will play out, we're not likely to do strategic planning for ten! Are you repositioning yourselves to take advantage of market niches? We don't know. What is the market test of your performance? Are you able to raise money from clients rather than from donors? No answers. I think I failed that test totally.

The task of analysis and reflection has become more critical now because of changes in the external environment. What should be our relationship with the government, as interventionists and collaborators? What should be our role vis-à-vis the private sector that wants NGOs as partners in their CSR activities? These are all difficult questions to answer. There is need for all NGOs to reflect deeply on these – both individually as well as collectively.

EZVIDYA

Ganesh: I am Ganesh from EZ Vidya, and this is my colleague Bala. From the previous presentation, I take three cues – operating profit, niche market, EBITA (earnings before interest, taxes and amortization) and other things. We are into it 365 days a year because we are a for-profit organization, and we decided to be that way. That is one.

The second: I want to say "Absolutely, yes" to the five levels. The moment we see that we are on Level 3, we find ourselves landing on Level 2, or Level 1 at times. What Shubhra said is very important – when we are looking at getting more people, are we aligning ourselves well?

That is the core of our presentation as well.

We took a step back and looked at what this gathering, the Partners' Forum, is all about. We want to bring an analogy or metaphor for this. All of us are a school of fish coming together to fight certain sharks, which could be status-quo, mediocrity, or conventional notions. We are proud to be part of this, because it becomes crucial input for our work to know the thoughts of for-profit and not-for-profit, and the latest experiences and narratives.

Our quest is taking quality education to mainstream schools. I am not sure whether we have a definition of a mainstream and an alternative school. So what we are talking about could be an alternative state for mainstream or alternative schools. Our mission is 'Let the child blossom', and we look at education innovation through research. Bala will take you through the unique initiatives of our mission.

Bala: By mainstream, we mean all the other schools apart from the ones Arun was talking about – so any school that has 40-50 kids in it. As of now, it happens to be private schools. We started off as an entrepreneurial venture, which doesn't necessarily mean that we subscribe to any particular ideology. We started that way, and we've chosen to remain on that path, just to see where it takes us. And we are determined to take it further.

'Quality education' – we put it in quotes because it is quality education as we understand it. We have tried to articulate what we mean by it. There are certain frameworks that we have developed, and we can share it with you. But from our experience of interacting with each of you, it's not very significantly different from what I believe we all have in our minds about what 'good education' is.

For instance, in the movie that Jagjot showed about Digantar, Rohit mentioned a few very simple things – moving away from rote learning, learning with understanding, an affectionate and cordial relationship between the teacher and the taught… These are some of the basic things that we are working towards.

EZ Vidya was started in 2001 by Chitra Ravi. In 2010, we launched a programme called Chrysalis, which now happens to be our mainstay, and with which we work in mainstream schools. We work with about 600 schools, predominantly in the southern part of India, and some in Delhi-NCR.

The difficult question posed to us was, "What are you guys doing by

way of organizational development?" It was, for us, an opportunity to go back and also see what we were doing. Some of it is very conscious, some of it perhaps a little unconscious. The topic is vast, so we will not be talking about the larger OD initiatives or the frameworks that we use and so on, but share a couple of small, simple things that we do.

One of our challenges as we have grown to 150 people and as newer people come in is, how do we maintain the core parts of the organization? Meaning, our beliefs, our notion of what quality education is, and also how we should get there. A few years back, we started to try putting words to what we believe could be some key traits that we all should work towards, or possess. These traits mean what we are and also what we want to be. We try to practise them, but they are also an ideal for us to look forward to. We keep reminding each other about where we want to get, and so on. These are simple traits, evolved over time.

My favourite among the things we feel we should develop, being in this domain, is to be more insightful – going deeper into an issue, challenge or aspect, to have a deeper understanding and engagement and glean out a shared meaning so that we can progress.

Here's one example of how we reinforced this message. In our empowerment sessions we find various ways to engage with our own people as well as with teachers on the notion of facts and opinions. Why is this important? Often, statements happen to be highly opinionated. For example, we have a team of people who go out to schools. They come back and say, "It's very difficult. These children will not study." Many a time, people just come back with what they hear. A teacher says, "Parents are saying it's very difficult to help with homework," and that's picked up by young people who come back and say, "Sir, teachers are saying that parents have said it's very difficult to help with homework."

We need to get into a dialogue about this comment and ask questions like: What sort of parents? Of which class? For which subject? What kind of homework was difficult? Can you give an example? Have they tried something and found it difficult? Or did they just see it, read it and think it to be difficult? Now, this kind of conversation that we have with our own people, we would like them to have with the teachers. One way is to ask them, "Is this a fact or an opinion?" Invariably, they sheepishly grin and say, "It's an opinion." So they must get the facts behind it. This is not to say that opinions are not important, just that it is important to base them on facts. Only then can there be a dialogue. Otherwise it's your opinion versus mine.

Another trait we have discovered of late is something called growth mindset. Stanford's Carol Dweck has done a lot of research on this. It's a very simple idea, at the heart of which is the belief that – like the teacher from Digantar said – by putting in effort, we can improve ourselves. My abilities in doing something are not fixed. If I put in enough effort, I can slowly get better. Obviously, the pace will be different from person to person. This is something we all would like to believe in, and pass it on to the world around as well. Ganesh will continue as to how we build on this trait.

Ganesh: We have two notions in our appraisal process. I am sure all of us have this process at the end of the year where we discuss if we have reached the results we wanted, and what efforts we have put in for getting to them. We distinguish this as output versus outcome. We define output as: Have we all put in wholehearted effort to reach the goal? It is well documented. And then we look at outcome, which could be zero revenue.

There may be various people who have not really performed well from an outcome point of view. But we have still retained them, and looked at how to carry on with them, because of their disposition – they may be putting in a lot of effort, and are sincere, honest people. So we looked at output and then continued our work with them even if there was no outcome. We call this a growth mindset because the assumption here is that I consciously improve my process of improvement and hence I will perform better.

In order to also bring all these traits together and align them to our larger schooling framework, we have the EZ Vidya Common Denominators, or ECDs. These include ten things such as insightfulness, growth mindset, childlike behaviour, inquisitiveness, creativity... We have articulated them in terms of possible indicators by which we can actually do our empowerment sessions and daily dialogues with our colleagues, and also look at what is an idealistic disposition to look for.

We also have something that we practise daily – distributed leadership. We want to build the notion that every voice is heard and if the idea or thought or action is appropriate, irrespective of from where or whom it is coming, it will be taken and executed. We want to put this into practice. So we started a Core Team in 2015. We said, "If you would like to part of organizational decisions, narratives, or discourses, join us." A lot of people nominated themselves. We had internal and external

people talking to them, as well as presentations, leading sessions and so on, and selected the Core Team. We have someone who has been with us for the last ten years or so. She had joined us as a DTP operator and is now part of the Core Team because of her ability to contribute.

This Core Team gives us a lot of insights and perspectives, looks at ideas and viewpoints from various levels of the organization, etc. Currently, there are three or four very important organizational initiatives which have been given to them, of which they are doing a 360-degree view and taking decisions on behalf of the organization.

Bala: I want to add a small thing here. There is a hierarchy that exists within the organization to manage teams and so on – team leads, heads of departments, whatever. The Core Team does not necessarily consist of managers. It was thrown open. The selection process involved people who were not within the organization but also well-wishers, who were asked to choose the most promising people who had the fire in the belly, so to speak. Some of the managers who applied did not get selected, while some of the 'juniors' did. We were open to that. We knew this would happen. We communicated that this was precisely the idea – we wanted more people involved in this movement, or at least what we want to make a movement.

Ganesh: The average age of functional heads with EZ Vidya would be about eight years. It kind of conveys that either we are very complacent, or very inclusive and taking people along. There is a lot of diversity – those bored after doing engineering, or who have been teachers or developmental professionals or in a corporate environment have come in. There are different fishes, all trying to fight against the shark. Thank you.

EKLAVYA

Anjali: Eklavya is 34 years old, and I've been with it starting from the discussions of its inception, which used to take place in the Delhi University Coffee House. A couple of characteristics which I feel perhaps set Eklavya apart from other organizations is that it is still not identified with any single individual, like Digantar would be with Rohit or VBERC, for some time at least, was with Hardy, and Vikramshila still is with Shubhra-ji. So,

we've been reflecting, there is a certain structure and process in Eklavya from its genetic make-up. I am going to take you through certain phases very briefly, and tell you how the work, the context, and the funding have related to organizational transitions.

A couple of issues that have held Eklavya together include this value of dissent. Eklavya values and gives space, provided you have the energy to struggle with your dissent. And I think that dissent shapes the quality of work. I read an example of some very good researchers who were actually taken as partners of people who were absolutely critical of their work, so that they had to respond constantly to that criticism.

The other issue that has constantly been there is the debate between centralization and decentralization. Eklavya was initially called Centres for Education. The design was to set up different centres. So there was a huge debate as to whether there should be a central office at all, and what that central office would do to the organization.

Eklavya was set up with a lot of government backing, both at Centre and State levels – from the Planning Commission, with what at that time was called the Education Department at the Centre, DST (Depatment of Science and Technology) and the Madhya Pradesh State Government. Mr Behar was Honorary Director because he was still in service. The purpose was recognized, to develop curriculum materials and curriculum programmes within the government school system – a debate in which we have been with Parminder and others, whether to get into the government system or to have something outside.

So it's been one – and probably the only – organization which has had this privilege to experiment with curriculum. You can do other things – teacher training, materials, libraries – within the government school system. But the core of curriculum development within the government school system was a very important thing, which I don't think any other such organization has had, and which now we also don't think that we will ever have again.

All the funding – except for the seed funding – was from the government for the phase 1982-1995. There was a process of self-selection into the Academic Council, something like what Ganesh was saying. People were looked out for and absorbed into it. There was always a council, no individual head who took decisions. This was a part of the Constitution.

The other interesting and important part was that the governing body was involved in the creation of this Constitution, and they were all part of the HSTP (Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme) set up by

Kishore Bharti, and which was the background for forming Eklavya. They agreed that the Academic Council, a body within itself, would select the director who would be accountable to that council. Also, there would be no full-time director.

For the first 20-25 years, we had directors who were integral parts of organizations, of programmes, with programme responsibilities. The governing body acted as a kind of a patron/sounding-board/advisor, and consciously had a fairly hands-off policy. I think this was facilitated by a time when there were no pressures of targets and efficiency and programme funding. We would have a proposal and give an annual narrative to the government funders. Some of the best work, for which Eklavya is known till now, was developed in this phase – the Social Science programme, the Prashika programme, etc.

Then we went through this transition, in a sense. It was a very vibrant but critical phase where the management of government institutions itself was undergoing change and decentralization, particularly post-Panchayati Raj. At the same time, there was DPEP with which we had integral involvement, and we had a certain amount of high, both in Madhya Pradesh and in other states, of actually influencing curriculum development. We thought this would last forever.

Within three years of those efforts expanding, there was a huge backlash. During this process, there was a slight change in the structure. By 2002, the transition to private funding was also taking place. The relationship between the governing body and the Academic Council remained the same, but there was an informal kind of an EC [executive committee] getting formed within. This was also the time when there was the inception of a new organization, Samavesh, growing out of Eklavya – through some dissent, not particularly through design, but we were able to facilitate that in a fairly amicable manner.

Also, in 1994-95 a second generation had come in of people similar to the earlier generation, and by 2002 they all exited. So there was a vacuum with regard to the transition of leadership. And because programmes were expanding, people had been taken in for work, rather than the different kind of self-selection that we had wanted to do.

Then there was a second phase of restructuring. The government schools programme closed down totally in 2002, and we reinvented ourselves to find three major thrusts of community based work – of resource organization, not the field based curriculum development, and of publications. We shifted totally to private funding. I don't know

whether it was a blessing or a bane, but the person who came from the Tata Trust actually said we were not savvy about private funding at all, that we were not going to continue with government funding, and would have to restructure ourselves. And that was the context in which the first actual OD exercise took place.

The structure earlier was developed by ourselves. It was integral, with programme, executive and administrative functions all taken care of together. Mr Padaki, who was here yesterday, did the first OD exercise with us. It resulted in a structure where the governing body role increased and another tier was added. There was more hierarchy.

Now we are in a transition into a new generation of leadership. Also, we have realized that much more interface than the previous structure was allowing the recent previous structure. So we are looking at ways in which we can have focused work along with more interface in this whole enterprise, how we can transition to the next generation and what the role of the outgoing generation would be, if any, in terms of mentorship and so on. Therefore the ideas of a Core Team shared by EZ Vidya would be interesting for us.

Nilesh: In 1994, I passed Class 12 and joined Eklavya as an admin support staffer. Continuing with my studies, I slowly learnt a lot from old-timers at Eklavya who were working on the Prashika programme. I collaborated with the community to start the Shiksha Protsahan Kendra in Shahpur, which I coordinated. After that, between 2010 and 2013, I worked in Eklavya with the Subject Resource Group. And now, in Tamiya, I am coordinating programmes in all of 50 schools. It is a totally new area, and I am working with a new team of six people. It's been only six months, but the programmes are fairly well established. Thank you.

Q&A

Hardy: One is just an addition to Anjali's presentation. I think no organization wants to be represented by a person, or remembered for one. So while Anjali is right that Eklavya is now not remembered for one person, initially, for many years, it was known as Vinod Raina's and Anil Sadgopal's organization – even though Anil Sadgopal was never part of Eklavya except for being in the governing body. I also feel that we need to recognize the role of individuals in setting up and consolidating

organizations. So while it is good not to be associated with one person, at the same time it is also important to recognize and record that individuals do play a central role.

The second small point is that the first contribution to Eklavya was actually from a corporate, which was later compensated for by the Tata Trust. We got a grant from an organization which we didn't want to finally own, so we returned that money and retained the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust grant. This is just to keep that in mind.

My question is to EZ Vidya because they escaped the problem of capacity building by not actually talking about how they actually do the OD process – the challenge for them is different from the challenges that I have faced. So I want to understand what their process is.

Qazi: My question is for EZ Vidya. What are the indicators of quality education? We hear this term quite often but it is not clear what it is.

Shaheen: I'll request Bala or Ganesh to quickly respond to that. But we will keep the discussion focused on organizational development and not on quality of education.

Preeti: This is also for the EZ Vidya team. I am really curious to know how you managed to create that Core Team, which was not essentially people in the different lines of management. You said some level of decision making was also given to them while they constituted the team. What was the action that happened after that Core Team was formed?

Lokesh: I have a question for Vidya Bhawan. You mentioned that one of the objectives was to start an educational discourse. Who were your targets? And what were some of the strategies you have adopted?

My second question is to Eklavya. You mentioned that you turned to publishing in 2002. Is it a publishing house where you publish books? Do you have any tracking mechanism for your publications – what number of books is going to teachers, to parents?

Bala: Hardy, I don't believe we 'escaped' the question of capacity building. What we were trying to hint at is one of the ways in which we build capacity is around the ECD traits, weaving a lot of our working around these. But on the 'how', well, there are many different things we do, starting from a very formal 'in-classroom'. We talk about what we

think are the aims, goals, processes and so on – an induction programme which is quite long and can last for several weeks. At least for people who are relatively early in their careers – we have lots of such people coming in – anything between eight months to a year and a half is pretty much an induction period. We don't expect them to start significantly contributing before a year. This includes classroom discussions, a lot of shadowing, going along with other people to schools and so on – which are all, from a very for-profit corporate perspective, sunken costs. But we do it.

We are also trying to leverage technology, like using a lot of SMSes. For example, if we say that this month we will focus on things around insightfulness, every other day we will send out these little quips saying, "Have you tried this?" or "Today, in your school, did you pry out a fact from an opinion?" and so on. We send them out ourselves – like, I do it. There is a team that focuses on this. We put together a talent management and organization development team which is, as of now, directly headed by Chitra.

I thought I did mention, Qazi, the indicators of quality education. More understanding, less rote, just being happy and wanting to engage with something called learning are, for us, the simplest indicators.

On the 'how' of the Core Team, we went through quite a bit of debate because we knew there would be repercussions to this – one being that somebody relatively 'senior' may not end up being in that team. But we built a climate for it. We started communicating with people what we were going to do, that it was going to be a three-month process.

The procedure for picking the Core Team was also fairly long. We had some outbound discussions, some workshops that the nominees had to attend and some that the nominees had to conduct. Then we had formal interviews with a panel of people and so on. We used a fairly long process to reinforce what the purpose was, and why we were trying to do this.

Fundamentally, the purpose was twofold. One, identifying potential leaders in the organization. Two, having minds which could focus on some long term initiatives that fall under the 'important but not urgent' quadrant, which tend to go under the carpet. Do we have, if not a long-term, a mid-term plan for the organization? Invariably, most of us are not able to answer that question because we are just so involved in fire-fighting. So we needed some minds that could just take this question and spend some time on it.

But all of it need not be such things. Some can be very simple things. For example, of late, we have the millennials who have started working

with us. And several things come under question, for example, working hours: "Why do you call me to work at 9 o'clock? I want to work at any time that I want to work. I don't feel creative at 9 am. I only feel creative in the middle of the night." Or: "Why do you want me to wear certain kinds of clothes? I want to wear all kinds of clothes and come to work." This is how the work culture is evolving, and we let the Core Team pick up these issues, talk to people, and come up with a document on, say: What kind of clothes should we be wearing? Should we even be defining it? Should there be some limits? We think there should be some limits because, obviously, we are going to schools, so we can't dress however we please.

Hardy: If you don't want to answer this, it is fine: Is there any financial compensation change linked to being a part of the Core Team, or is it independent of that?

Bala: There is no financial component. It is independent. I think the lead-up to the Core Team was much bigger than we had imagined. So it became very coveted within the organization. Everybody wanted to be a part of it. People we had never expected would even speak up, started applying for it.

In fact, one of them is like a case-study for us. She began as a DTP operator 15 years back when we started. It was such a revelation, because out of the 60-odd people who applied for it, finally there were eight who were selected as part of the Core Team, and she was one of them. She cannot speak much English, only Tamil. But the people involved in the selection process told us, "You know what? She's a firebrand. If you want to get work done, pull her into the Core Team – she's going to get it done for you." And we're seeing results now. She is the one who, more often than not, leads a lot of things and says, "We need to get this done."

Ganesh: As part of OD, when we have new people coming on board, we have a mentor assigned to each. It is an informal session where they can talk and discuss a few things. On the lighter side, we also had at least two to three people in our organization who participated in the first meeting and then ran away saying they weren't able to take such discussions!

As Balu said, eight were selected on the Core Team. We also took a decision that for people who nominated themselves, we would have a nurturing programme for a year. So if they came to the final round but

couldn't make it to the Core Team, we had a one-year-long nurturing programme for them and they re-applied. Out of six, four of them got in this year.

Incidentally, all the functional heads are NOT part of the Core Team. We are looking at this as an annual process.

Prasoon: Talking of discourse building, the biggest challenge for us was to create a platform where you could get people in the university thinking about mathematics, about language, in an esoteric way, getting them challenged by teachers who say, "Okay, all these things are fine, but tell us how to teach." Some of the questions we asked were: How is knowledge created? How do children learn? What are the circumstances where children will not learn? What is the nature of subjects? Why do we need to learn maths the way we do?

For example, there are many who say that maths has to be learnt from a real-life situation. We challenge that and ask why. At times we were called 'Why's – the people who only had whys, no answers. Then we also realized that there were some answers. As part of discourse building, it is important for us to remind people that there is no final word on any piece of knowledge. You need to keep adding to it. For that, we also work with publications – collecting many that are there, putting them together, and making them available to people. But making them available is not enough – we help them to actually read these. That is a real task. You create reading materials but find that within the Resource Centre you have people who will not read. So we worked on that, challenging them to read. We created structures where, every Wednesday and Saturday, we sit and read one paper. People are free to select which they want.

This is how we build discourse. There is no final word that this is how it is built. But finally, any interaction should not provide a final answer. We should leave people with some questions.

Hardy: You can look at resource building at multiple levels. One of the shortcomings in our education and development sector is the distance between theory and practice. All of us talk about that. Largely at the initiation of some other people who are very important and integral to the Vidya Bhawan Education Resource Centre – like Prof. Ramakant Agnihotri, Prof. Rajendra Singh and so on – Vidya Bhawan tried to create a series of forums where people came together. Not like this one, but different – a forum where we had a lot of university professors, school teachers and

people like us who work in education together. We discussed issues like the construction of knowledge, science education, language, music and mathematics. We were trying to bring to the education discourse ideas which perhaps were being discussed at the university level, so we could then document them and make them available in India. That's the kind of thing Prasoon is referring to.

The second thing Vidya Bhawan did – and I think it is largely Vidya Bhawan's initiative which made that happen – is that we had seminars in partnership with MHRD (Ministry for Human Resource Development), NCERT (National Council for Educational Research and Training) and four development organizations including NCTE (National Council for Teacher Education) for teacher education. There were also national seminars involving all of us, where we set up the discourse on teacher education. Those documents are still available, and people can refer to them. The current policy of teacher development emerged largely from the report that was created and documented at a seminar. The documents are available in English as well as Hindi.

With WATIS, we also documented the forum ecology. The idea is to try and create material that is academically sound and make it available in a form that can be accessed by different people.

Anjali: For our publications, we do have a tracking system. We collate that data annually, interact with the bulk purchasers of our publications, and do some workshops and things with them as well.

Nomita: This is to Eklavya. Something in your slide told me that as you scaled up and had more departments, some amount of bureaucratization entered into the organization. Could you elaborate on that? And how do you ensure that the culture of the organization permeates down to the last member of the organization, especially as you scale up?

Keerti: My question is related to my own concern from the perspective of OELP (Organisation for Early Literacy Promotion). In February this year, we participated in a summit on Flexible Strategies for Out-of-school Children. The fact is that there are still 58 million children who are out-of-school in this country. There are a lot of people here who have a lot of experience, and this question goes to all the groups represented here.

OELP chose to be a small organization because we saw ourselves in a knowledge building phase. We have now got to perhaps entering the

second phase that Shubhra-di mentioned – the expansion phase – for various reasons, because we have interacted with teacher education colleges: APF (Azim Premji Foundation), APU (Azim Premji University), AUD (Ambedkar University Delhi}, DU (Delhi University), etc. We have also been interacting with DIETs (District Institutes of Education and Training) and governments in a very small way. We are very small but perhaps people do see that an organization like ours can play some role somewhere. So there is a need – a sort of tug from ourselves as well as outside – to expand.

My question is that, from what I heard from Vikramshila, Eklavya and Vidya Bhawan, at the time when you entered this phase, there was space for some kind of organic process. At this point of time, we are feeling a huge pressure. One is, because of corporatization and also the fact that there are donor-driven agendas, there is this need to keep our alignment and stick to our vision and focus. But the most important and challenging is the fact of our location, which is rural. So getting people is not easy. We work with local teams, and our own internal capacity building is vital to our existence. We do see people coming on board, but are not sure how long they will last.

So my question is, whom do we go to for support, for advice? We definitely feel the need to professionalize. I don't want to talk about this as just our experience, but as one like ours – grassroots organizations seeking to professionalize. As it is we are posed with a lot of questions. OD, building in systems, processes, structures, sustainability, financial strategies… the whole gamut. And then we are also dealing with the for-profit organizations, start-ups, that kind of ethos.

So what would you suggest? I know it's a very naïve question but I am hoping for some answers.

Kanupriya: My questions/comments are not to anybody in particular. I am wondering whether OD in organizations that work in education has to, or needs to, be different from that in other organizations, both in the social sector as well as corporate. If different, then why? I think it's a question that we all have partial answers to, but it is something to think about.

From the presentations and also having worked in and with organizations small and big, I was wondering that if the economic landscape and our funding needs and processes had not changed so much in the last 20-25 years, would there have been such a deep need

for OD? Is that what has dictated how our organizations have developed in the last 25 years? How has the funding landscape influenced the organizational landscape?

And the third thing is something that I think about often. Today's discussion on OD was also sort of a discussion on the history of these organizations – how they have grown over the years. We don't have a very rich discipline of education in our country, in the sense that there are no university departments – or there weren't, till very recently – for Education. They were mostly teacher education or training departments. So the new knowledge in education has necessarily come from organizations like Eklavya and Digantar and Vidya Bhawan. And there is no compilation of that knowledge – it is still very loose and out there. The journey of these organizations is also the journey of education in our country. Not just in education – this morning, we were having a discussion about Pradan and how it has grown and impacted the field.

So I don't know if this question is to Wipro or others. Maybe we should do a whole Forum on just putting this history together, for future generations. Now there is so much talk of education from the human capital approach – we are a knowledge society – the structures within which the dialogues happen are changing. There is a lot of new interest in education, suddenly. All corporates are talking about education for their CSR funds. Wipro has been talking about it for years and years, but corporates that are now bound by law to give this money are looking to do something in education.

Also, a lot of young people are coming into education with organizations like Teach for India (TFI). They are a voice that is heard now by young people and there is a lot of young energy. So this history is really important to have for the next generation and even for a larger direction-setting for the field.

Anwar: Anjali, I want to understand or look at the relationship between the structure of the organization as it evolved and the type of tasks and the amount of justice you were able to do with it. I thought your presentation was very good, but very brief and slightly sanitized.

You mentioned that it was a decentralized organization and that was one of the lucky things because it allowed different people to flower in different ways and in different places, so that they could be free of each other. But at the same time, what were the strengths it gave in terms of the work was done, and also what weaknesses did it create? At one time,

there was the offer of spreading the science programme to the whole state, and other such tasks. Were these affected?

After that there was more of proper organization and restructuring. How has that helped in taking up different types of tasks? Is it more suitable now? That is interesting not just in terms of Eklavya but also other organizations that have evolved in this way.

Devika: My question is to the EZ Vidya team. You presented the EZ Vidya Common Denominator for building the capacity of people in the organization. You mentioned two – one was differentiating between fact and fallacy and the other was Carol Dwight's fixed mindset and growth mindset. And you said that there were several more like that, which you use from time to time. Now, all these seem to be more like habits of the mind, or values that you actually want to develop in your team, which of course is essential. Somewhere you also mentioned that the goal is quality education.

Would just developing these kinds of values – which are important – help in building the organization to whatever is the other goal? There was no mention, for example, about the other things you might need to build for the organization's growth in terms of the structure of the organization, or things like, let's say, planning or brand building, since you are saying that you are for-profit. What are the kinds of trainings you do, if you do?

Anjali: I think Keerti has a general question. We can all discuss further in the general session as well, the challenges that she and Kanupriya have posed. But just to comment briefly on capacity building for the rural teams. One thing that organizations didn't do for a long time was to plan in a way as to allocate time for the team's own capacity building. If there was teacher training to be done for someone else, there was preparation for that. But for our own capacity building, we didn't allocate time in everybody's plans. Now we are attempting to do that because the projects are very tight.

But funders do accept it if you plan for building capacity. This is a very crucial thing which we are not in the habit of doing at the beginning of the year. As and when the year progresses, we think we need to do this and how we must do it. But this way participation dates are not blocked and participation is not proper. We have field areas in eight to ten places, so getting everybody together becomes a challenge.

I would also like to respond to and maybe connect that issue of individual and collective – the space for and recognition of the individual. Vinod did play a very crucial role in the setting up of Eklavya, in facilitating the discourse between the HSTP resource group as to how we could take it forward in terms of an organization, and also the discussions with the government department and so on. There was a collective feeling, and that discourse happened. At times, it happened repeatedly; at times it also became quite tense. Every organization faces that, and the commitment to negotiate that tension is important. Eklavya has had a tendency to not recognize individuals by name for their contribution, to make it collective, and that could be frustrating for certain individuals. Now Eklavya publications go with people's names – earlier they didn't.

The tension between decentralization and centralization – whose suggestions and whose ideas will take shape into a programme and whose will be marginalized and so on – are there, as they were. We still have this field and academic tension, which we try to negotiate. But some of us – different people at different times – do bring back the value of the field, because it's very easy to give value to academic rigour more than the field engagement. Invariably, the field people have very good insights orally, but it is lost when they articulate these in writing. So they lose out on that aspect, and the organization also loses out on incorporating that strength. We constantly try to bring this sort of thing into centre stage.

So those are the strengths and weaknesses. We have struggled to maintain field centres despite odds. The field centres were set up because of the logic of expansion, initially. But we have continued to nurture these because we also realized that starting work in a new area requires that inception phase, and the advantage of having had one would be washed out if these centres didn't exist. We have closed down one or two centres and started in new areas because of management issues. How much can an organization manage? But we do need more centres. A networked kind of organization is required.

About bureaucratization... Because of the focus on efficiency and targeting, it does tend to get bureaucratized. If you form forums and they don't function, then you are in a false position. That leads to more bureaucratization – come through the proper channel, take these issues up there, and so on.

And typically in middle stage – that is, the second OD process – we did some kind of an assessment of where we were. Everybody participated in the assessment, and everybody in the organization realized that we

were in that complacency and bureaucratization phase. This was after these programme committees had been formed, and they had functioned like that, in silos. That was a good wake-up call that we needed to do something about it, and about ownership across the organization. Now it is not only the leadership or an external funding organization saying that it needs to be done, but internally, people feel the need to interface more and break this bureaucratization.

How will we be able to do the restructuring of the functioning of the bodies that we have? How will we tweak or reform it? We are in the process of deciding on that. A year down the line, those new things should be stabilized.

Culture... It happens through different levels of meetings – constant meetings. The centres have their meetings, issues are raised, and those issues are resolved – as a team, not by an individual. But there is encouragement for the openness to raise those issues in a forum and discuss them, and to get the grapevine into formal structures because that is something which dissipates the culture of an organization. Your frustrations get voiced not in the forums but outside, or there is passive resistance and so on. That process happens continuously. There is also talk of the role of leadership positions to encourage those processes constantly – who is the programme coordinator, whose business is it to do certain things, and so on. Facilitation is required.

We don't have a formal HR group or a grievance redressal group. We've found the need for it and maybe we will make space for something like that. But at the moment, it happens across. That Core Team concept with people from different backgrounds... the earlier AC (Academic Council) made attempts to represent all kinds of levels, and that was a training ground for culture in the first 20 years because that was an apex decision making body. It was not as if project or programme coordinators only were represented – even support staff were there.

Bala: Devika wanted to know more about the ECD traits. In some ways it also relates with what Anwar was asking about how the organization structure develops as tasks develop.

I think, very early on, we pretty much didn't have any structure at all. This is not to say that we didn't have any tasks at all. We had some things to do. But all of us did everything. As we evolved, there were specialized tasks which called for a specialized kind of empowerment and training. For example, you spoke of a marketing team, and we do

have a communications team.

We did two things. One, we started hiring specialized people. In the last three-four years we have put in place an analytics team. We have an information system that we developed over years which gathers a lot of information online from different teams – people who go to schools, or are developing material. All this interacts with that system, and we are constantly feeding information. The analytics team pores over all this data, trying to quantify it and see if there are patterns. Like, if all schools under a particular team are doing much better, why, what are the reasons?

These are newer functions that have emerged and it means that correspondingly, (a) at a hiring level, we have changed and (b) these are people who start attending specialized kinds of training. We send them out for little courses. Even within the core education domain, we have, over time, felt the need to strengthen ourselves on concepts. For instance, I went to Digantar and then enrolled for a Master's immediately. But now I might start hiring people from Azim Premji University. We feel the need to strengthen each of these domains. So both from a hiring and a continuous development perspective, there are consequences.

Ganesh: Also, functional heads have their own budgets for training. So they can decide what kind of training programmes they want to do – internally, off-site or calling an external person.

Nayan: My question is to Vidya Bhawan. In your presentation, you mentioned that you are facing challenges of managing a huge campus, 400 staff, 2,000 children and so on. So I assume that a lot of your organizational time goes into managing and doing this part of the work. Yet you are continuing to flourish as a vibrant organization. Can you share some of the processes you follow that balance the reflecting and learning alongside the doing and managing?

Yogesh: My question is for Vikramshila. You spoke about organization values. How did you arrive at those and how do you ensure that team members are aligned to these values?

A question for EZ Vidya... You said your team members currently number 60. When you are growing, how do you ensure that the EZ Vidya Common Denominator is transferred to the new people who join your organization?

And for Eklavya... You said that when you moved from government funding to non-government funding, you faced a lot of challenges. What are the learnings you gained from that transition that a new NGO can use?

Vishnu: I heard very little said about recruiting the right kind of people in terms of quality, value fit, as well as letting people go quickly – except, I think Bala spoke a little bit about it. Any thoughts on this? For me, one of the biggest things has been being able to recruit the right kind of people and also letting go of people quickly.

Shubhra Chatterji: The moment a social organization comes into existence, it is defined by a set of values. We choose a vision, a mission statement, like equity and quality for all, based on a set of personal values of the people who start the organization. Then, as people start coming in, they are asked to relate with what those values mean to them because, after all, we are all guided by our personal values. If they don't match those of the organization, you can't survive.

This is how we have been able to retain people. There are deep discussions on values, all the time. We have been very conscious in nurturing that. Sometimes we also ask them to just reflect on their own values. For any programme, we bring it up and say, "But why are we doing it?" We have an induction folder where there is a whole brief on values. We have seen that people who are not able to connect with the values, drift away. For those who are one with the values, that is the source of their motivation and energy – because it has to be living, not something printed. When you walk in, you feel that this organization stands for certain values.

Prasoon: Vidya Bhawan institutions are independent. So they have their own independent director and principal to take care of the campus. But the problem is that we need to make our campus – for example, the school campus – friendlier for students. For that we need resources. For example, the toilets need to be cleaned every day. The school administration needs to be concerned about the common space that's there. The same for our teacher-training college and our postgraduate college. The hostels need to be more friendly for people who come for training. For all these, we need resources. We need to also change people's mindsets – teachers being concerned about the fact that it is important for children to get

clean toilets and good drinking water facilities. These are the challenges. It is not as if they are not happening, but the quality has to change.

Talking about OD and the individual, we have been trying to create democratic forums within Vidya Bhawan. So now we have an Equal Opportunity Committee where any staffer or even school student can come in. We have that at the apex level and also at the level of school and other institution. Anybody who has a stake in Vidya Bhawan can go and file a complaint. If it is not taken cognizance of within 15 days, then that report can be sent to the president's office. He is the head of the apex Equal Opportunity Committee. Similarly, we have an Academic Committee, where we discuss academic issues.

We must realize that we are all working in a very resource constrained environment. It is not as if there are ready teachers who come and start teaching the way you want. You need to invest in them. You don't get a readymade principal. What I have learnt from Hardy and from Eklavya is creating space for dissent. So each work that is given, you have to evolve that, people will examine that, and you will have to leave it with questions. Then somebody takes the final decision that okay, your questions are valid. But given the circumstances, it has absolutely nothing to do with funding. We have also learnt that if you really have a system where you ensure that your employees are learning something, the chances that they will stay with you are much higher than when they are not learning.

Anjali: The challenge with corporate funding works both ways. One is that the systems and capacities of staff and members need to be improved, so that learnings are gleaned, and note-taking and reporting abilities are improved. We have a tendency to just recount, with a lot of the irrelevant stuff in there, and often the relevant stuff that might have an insight is missing. Making that a system and incorporating it into the daily work would help because corporate insistence on reporting requires writing right from the beginning. Also the planning that you capture in your writing is important – what you are going to look for?

Equally important is the confidence to negotiate with the funders that the education field is different. To say that their targeting and beneficiaries and efficiency criteria won't work in the same way – to say why they don't work, and therefore, building in those spaces in the projects. This is something NGOs often don't do, because they are looking for funds and willing to take them whichever way they come. In that sense, WATIS has been really liberal. They have had confidence in us and

let us grow – the same confidence that was there in the 80s and the 90s, with the MHRD, which is why the Digantars and Eklavyas and MVF (M Venkatarangaiya Foundation) have grown. They didn't ask for targeting and things like that.

About recruitment – yes, that's a challenge. In the initial phase, because people were seeking for something alternative they had that motivation, and they had also a learning curve. That was assumed. So we would only assess their domain expertise. Now we have a fairly formal process. We advertise, put up our requirements and so on. In this process, we are unable to gauge their learning abilities and motivation. We are in the trap of assessing only domain competence, and we find that it stagnates very quickly. So we have to address the new scenario. How do we identify good people, nurture them, and make a climate like EZ Vidya mentioned – that there should be a faster growth path for a person to get acceptability in the organization, not only by seniority. I think Vidya Bhawan struggles more with that than Eklavya. So those are things we need to do.

Ganesh: On the recruitment front, of course it is very difficult and quite a struggle to get the right people. But of late, we have found two trends. One is that there are youngsters who are quitting other jobs to come into the development field. The proof, or example, is the TFIs of the world.

The second is that, interestingly, for people who are applying for postgraduation in the US, there is weight given in the selection process to those who work for a couple of years in the developmental field. So there are graduates who actually come and tell us that we would like to pursue our higher studies but want to take a two-year break to work with EZ Vidya.

Having said that, we also look within. When people leave our organization, we have a formal or informal exit interview to find out the reasons behind their leaving. Also, after every interview, we have tabulative structures where we do an analysis on what kind of offer and what role profile we gave, who accepted, who didn't, and what we can learn from it.

To sum up, recruitment is a challenge. So we are constantly looking out for people. Added to this, we have also had a policy decision from the start that we will not recruit from any of our partner schools. A lot of teachers are interested to work with us and we have to politely say no.

Organization Development in the social/non-profit sector– Open Discussion

Moderated by Hardy Dewan and Vishnu Agnihotri

Vishnu: This session is an open discussion about organizational development issues in the social non-profit sector. People shared a bunch of questions and issues they wanted to discuss, and we have chosen three themes which seem to capture most of the discussable points they raised.

The structure is that I will read out one question on one theme and describe it, and we will have a discussion around that. Then we go on to the next one. The first question is about the necessity for an organization to grow. Should you scale or not? What is the optimal size? Should you not go beyond a certain size? And should you plan your own demise as an organization?

Hardy: It is an important question – should an organization exist for a specific purpose, for a short duration of time, or for a long time? Is there a size beyond which it should not grow? Because given the nature of the organizations we have, they start creating certain tensions, problems or difficulties of all kinds. So that's the area.

Rohit: I don't know whether this question can ever be answered, Hardy. The thing is that organizations start with some purpose and ideal, and in society the importance of those particular purposes as well as ideals might change over time. Therefore, ideally speaking, all organizations should cease to exist as soon as they have either achieved their purpose, or that purpose is finished in society.

But actually what happens is – we all know it, particularly the people who have been involved in running organizations – that to achieve the purpose, we create a structure. And the structure becomes important and acquires its own life. Therefore, even if we fail to achieve that purpose, or if the purpose changes, we keep on creating or inventing new purposes because there are people whose lives are associated with that structure.

And therefore it becomes a slightly different kind of organization.

This is something like what Gandhi recommended at one time to the Congress – that they had achieved their purpose and should disband. They didn't, because they wanted to have the fruits of achieving their purpose. I think a similar thing happens with organizations. But it seems to me that if one thinks from the other point of view, then perhaps in society there will always be some or the other problem. Therefore, if organizations can somehow build in two things – one is a sustainable structure and the other a very strong moral chip – that allows them to pick up only those purposes and issues which are the need of society, and not give in to any other reasons, either governmental or internal, in that case, perhaps, the longevity of the organization and the structure becomes important.

The last thing I will say is that without this strong chip, creating a mechanism for holding on to the structure and continuously growing it is actually a dangerous thing. Then you are developing so many pockets of vested interests that have a certain kind of expertise in society, and they will pull in different directions which will benefit their owners – I am deliberately using the term 'owners' here – and no one else.

That is why I was saying that it depends on the situation – what you are doing and whether a concrete answer for all times is possible. It is very doubtful.

Margaret: I agree with what Rohit said. We have a purpose or aim and begin something. After some time, we become a little ambitious and want to enlarge it. It goes out of our hands and finally we don't know what to do with it. The quality also suffers. But if there is a certain discipline within us and we stick to what we are doing, we will be able to do quality work and benefit people, and if there is an important issue we could take it up.

Naveen: It's been seven years since we started and we've reached a stage where we now probably need to scale up. And these are the kind of questions we've been grappling with.

I don't know if I agree with the earlier response that there is clearly no one way to do this, and I don't know whether scaling up is always necessarily bad. I think it depends on many issues such as leadership and how well you are thinking through these processes. I feel that you spend a lot of time trying to make ends meet from the minute you start as a small

organization with a handful of people who set off on a certain journey. A large part of the energy is spent in sustaining the momentum. After a point, the process of building the institution becomes more important than what you set off with.

I don't think there is one answer to it, as was said earlier. But it depends on a lot of other things, like how you build a team, who your leaders are, and where you see yourself in another four-five years. A lot of these challenges are always changing. We work in the environment sector. So there is no one 'situation' that you deal with, after which you put your feet up feeling you've dealt with the issues and now the world is a better place. These are also changing – they are a constantly changing dynamic. It all depends on how the organization deals with it.

Vishnu: Naveen, would you like to share a little bit more? Yours is more like an academic response. All of us know that questions don't have one answer but come from a certain tension. So if you could elaborate…?

Naveen: Well, for instance, we work on a few field sites, and a lot of the projects have developed good traction and need to now scale up. But when we do that, we are investing more in the organization. We are building a team, so we need to sustain this team, right? It depends on how we build the model.

So what we are looking at is, how do we build a team which has a strong core, and the rest are more or less floating populations of people who come on project work and move out? But at least you need to retain the core of that team. How do you build a model in which the top is light and the bottom is heavy – where the floating population is something that you can actually invest in, but not necessarily be very concerned about? Especially when it comes to building a corpus and things like that, you don't have to factor in those issues.

Keerti: It's to do with the present we are in. I am going to share a bit of my experience. In the late 80s, we had a small group. I wouldn't like to call it an organization, but we got a small amount of funding from WWF (World Wildlife Fund), and it was called Schools Environment Network. There was space to grow organically. We were able to, through that process, develop a resource bank called Web of Life, which Arvind Gupta has put up on his website.

It was a very exciting journey. Various people came on board and so

on. It grew organically into another group called Free the Trees, because of the concreting around trees and what was happening in Delhi's environment, etc. And then it just died a natural death. It existed in different ways in different places. But each one of us moved on.

Since 2008 we have been working in a few sites, growing and learning, engaging very intensively with the government system as well as local communities, and we have what we call our knowledge building core. Ideally, we would love to continue to function like that but I don't think we have the option. In the last two years, I've gone nuts trying to find some kind of support for our core capacities.

Scaling, I think, is an academic question. Small is not beautiful in today's world, in my experience. You have to provide numbers, some level of scale. I don't see a choice. If there is, please tell me where it is.

Suhel: We know there is a trade-off as you grow. There are some things you lose, some things you gain. People always ask: What is your strategy for growth? As if growth was self-evidently a good thing. I don't think it's an academic question but a very practical one that we all grapple with. So I'm wondering, are there organizations that you are in or you know of that have consciously and successfully limited their growth, and do you know how and why they did it?

The other question was about demise. I do think organizations can take a life of their own. But that's a description of how things are. It doesn't mean that's how it ought to be. So I'm wondering if anybody knows. I haven't found a single example yet of any organizations that have started with – or acquired along the way – the intention of phasing themselves out after a certain amount of time. How can the work, values and ideas of an organization continue when the organization itself doesn't exist any more?

Chandrashekar: Suhel started the point that I wanted to raise. At some point the organization may fade away into the background. But if it is able to start a movement and can sustain itself, then it just takes on a life of its own. At that point, the organization can decide to stop. But you have got people thinking along these lines, and they recognize the need we have been trying to address. Therefore, the idea lives on. The movement takes care of that. The organization becomes less of an issue. So I wouldn't call it a demise, really. I would say that having served, the idea is still there in some form.

Anjali: Particularly in the social sector of education, this question of why we should grow has been bothering me as well. In terms of why we are there, I see all of us at every Forum discussing issues of non-performance of the government school system. That is a huge school system. Whether being that huge and not broken up into smaller, more chewable units itself is a problem, is another question.

But does the social sector need to be developed to reform the ills of that system? Or would it be better done by working within the system? As community groups, how do we put pressure on it? Sometimes, in trying to impact, organizations like ours have lost that space in the community. And the funders have helped us lose that space, by constantly asking, "What are you doing there? How are you mainstreaming your work?" and so on.

That is a question I don't have answers to. But this is something that we need to reflect on. If we need to put pressure on that system to perform, then what are the kinds of organizations, movements, funding structures and so on that we need? How do we need to grow, or not grow?

In response to Suhel's question, a couple of organizations I know of – for example, Nirantar – decided not to grow the way of setting up more centres in different places. They were doing good work, but to become a small core resource organization, for project funding they took up small support projects. Another organization is SECMOL (Students' Education and Cultural Movement of Ladakh). Often the structuring of organizations and growth through larger structures kills the spirit of that movement.

About our mentor organization... A few years after we were formed, it decided to close down. Anil has written a book on that – Ek Prayog Ko Bandh Karne Par (On Closing Down an Experiment). They actually did that. There were some painful processes. They existed from 1971 to about 1988-89. So that was a conscious decision to close down.

Rohit perhaps can say more about David's organization, for example, which didn't outlive his life. But those seeds I see in Rohit or Rishi Valley or other places... that way, that spirit has gone on longer.

Rohit: David Horsborough, of course, consciously refused to grow. For people who don't know about him, he ran a very small school of between 20 and 28 children, and he simply refused to grow. But then, David was an adamant person. I mean, he didn't get funding from outside. He ran it from his royalty. It was more of an outward extension of David rather than an organization in the sense of Eklavya or Vidya Bhavan, etc. So that

was a different motive.

If we make a distinction between some organizations that we call institutions and general civil society organizations like us, I think we can look a little deeper into the question.

Schools, universities, various kinds of hospitals and research institutions see a need in society which is perpetual. Together with that, the growth of knowledge, of procedures and of methodologies is constantly required. Therefore they are fulfilling a need and simultaneously building knowledge, and procedures and capabilities in that. So those organizations actually need longevity because they also need to learn from the knowledge built by others and themselves.

Organizations that have purposes which are not as stable as that, perhaps do not need to stay for ever. What Anjali is saying is a very crucial question, actually. There is an institution – let's call it the institution of public education – that is malfunctioning. So to support it, do we require a tree which cannot grow straight, or a tree which can push it up? We would be those supporting trees. If the main tree becomes straight and beautiful, then we automatically die. Now, is that actually a good model? Have we reached a conclusion that larger public systems cannot function on their own and they will always require some support from outside? That is another issue.

Lastly, I think I find this question spurious: "What is your strategy for growth?" I think the best answer is, "I have no strategy for growth. I don't want a strategy for growth." But then, that is again not a very good answer because funders sometimes ask you that. All I would say is, if someone is doing something small which contributes good value for the money they are spending, please recognize that, rather than constantly asking them to change the world.

Ramkumar: For me, the constant question has been how the education scenario, especially in the developmental sector will change in the next three or five years. I have been listening to the people and talking to them, here as well as outside.

One such scenario is that with the advent of many CSR programmes in the education sector, a lot of funding is getting into it. Each company is coming out with its own rating scale to measure each NGO. Very soon, we will have a rating system similar to NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council). They will start ranking NGOs for funding purposes, and then you get into a scenario where scaling and visibility

become important. Funding will be tied to that. So we are getting into a scenario where, whether we like it or not, we have to accept the ranking of NGOs in the future. It is going to happen because corporates want it. They want to be associated with the first-rank NGO and get whatever brand mileage.

The second important thing is what will happen. Now we are all spread out in a small geography. In the same school, if three or four NGOs sponsored by different corporates get in, and each has their own piece of action, what will happen to the school, the teachers and the children? We are not thinking about that. But I can slowly visualize it happening in Bangalore's urban schools, where three or four NGOs get involved in a particular school because it is a slum school and, in particular, in an MLA's constituency. How do we grapple with such things?

Bala: I have some thoughts. One: I would argue that organizations do need to grow, simply because they need to sustain, and one way of sustaining is growing, for the following reasons.

If we go by what Anurag was saying, that there is a lot of work to be done, much more than all of us put together can manage to do in this lifetime, then that straightaway is one simple reason to grow.

The purposes that most of us affiliate ourselves towards sometimes are of such a kind that it is imperative we create institutions – not just some people who can exist on an ad hoc basis. Essentially, through good education, we are aiming for a better world and a better society, which then makes it a moral responsibility for us to find ways to sustain and grow. I find it impossible to think of saying, "Now we have achieved our purpose, therefore our job is done." One of the purposes of EZ Vidya, apart from the work we do in schools, is finding ways to allow people to find joy in the work they do, which we see all around us has diminished or is almost extinct. People are working just like automatons and we think humans are not meant to be so. Or just for people to realize their potential. Now, these are ambitions which can never find an end point.

A question we need to ask ourselves is, do we believe that what we are doing is at least marginally better than what it is in our absence? If it is, then I think there is reason to grow. It may not be the ideal way of doing things. There may be lots of gaps. As we evolve, we find ways of understanding and plugging these gaps better. But one strong reason for all the people I see around me growing is simply to prevent mediocrity from growing.

Also, if someone set out with the plan that after n number of years, I will self-destruct, then where is the motivation to do any sort of quality work? At least in my mind, the whole plan becomes like an ad hoc plan.

Finally, what I am hearing from this question also is that as we grow, there are things that start going wrong. Now, if we can find for ourselves what we believe is core to our existence and the sorts of non-negotiables, if we are able to look at peripheral things and discern between these two and say that if there are some peripheral things that are not growing the way I want them to grow…

For instance, something as simple as a funder wanting to tom-tom its name is not something that goes well with me. But if I am going to achieve certain benefits, if I am going to improve the quality of education and somebody's name gets published in the process, then I don't see what is wrong with it.

So something which is core and something which is peripheral, we can discern between these two and say that we shall safeguard the non-negotiables as we want to grow.

Keerti: I want to put to this group the fact that there is enough research now to show that the transition from oracy to literacy does not happen naturally. The Emergent Literacy perspective clearly tells us that early home environment supports literacy. We know that there is a vast number of children in this country who do not have that environment. We do not have an understanding of early literacy acquisition within children from non-literate backgrounds – first-generation learners. We have hardly any research to show natural ways of literacy acquisition within Indian languages. I am very excited that APU has begun some work, and Tata Trust.

We have practically no research on issues of transition from home to school. We are leaning on research from the Western context. Groups like ours want to remain small because we want to do in-depth work. I am terribly worried because I feel that there is a whole lot of work happening in urban and semi-urban contexts. We are a very diverse country. Sometimes it feels like we are trying to add up unequal fractions without looking at the common denominators. It's mind-boggling.

We are so assessment and learner driven. We equate children from Bawre ki Dhani in Ajmer with a fancy school in Bangalore. We are putting them through the same reading skills. I am troubled about learning standards. Maybe I don't have the wisdom or the experience to look

beyond my own personal experience, and if I spend another five years tracking the 25 children from the Bagaria community we have enrolled into school – who are struggling in school – I think that will be of great value to others. It's knowledge building. And what's wrong with that? What's wrong with doing more in-depth work?

So I think I fully agree with your purpose. But my purpose is not your purpose. The trouble is that my purpose is not savvy. My purpose is not something that will get brand value or market value. I am getting to the point where I really wonder whether people really want children to learn. Where is the research in this country? Sorry, I am speaking so passionately because this is something very worrisome. We are grappling with it.

I am not trying to negate that there's a lot of work happening. But it's getting snuffed out. And if we don't watch it, if we don't guard it, if we don't come together, the corporate sector is going to take over. That's my worry.

Sheeshpal: I have been working with an organization called the Shaheed Virender Smarak Samiti in Samalkha, Panipat. Three days before I came here I joined the State Resource Centre, Haryana. My worry is that whether it is the Shaheed Virender Smarak Samiti or the State Resource Centre, they both came into existence thanks to the BGVS (Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti). And I presume that the BGVS scenario that I see in Haryana is more or less the same in the rest of the country.

There are several things that appear to be movements. But some things that evolve within an organization remain unseen. From what I understand from the discussions in the current session, there is need for development both as an organization and as a movement. So I have been grappling with the question: Along with the movement, how do things evolve as an organization?

Hardy: I want to make a point because I think it is important to understand this question, place it in a context. I think there is another silent participant in this conversation who is not here, which is the funder. All of us are passionate, all of us have sacrifices and goals in our minds, and there is this devil funder who does not understand that. But I think it is time to think about the funder also. What is the funder looking for? How does he trust us? Are the questions he asks us justified, or not?

Therefore the question that the organization development throws at

us is: Should we think of ourselves as a structure which will continue to be there and not end with the purpose? Or should we look for a structure which will continuously change purpose? Because somewhere, then, the responsibility of making that choice is yours. It is your desire to do this. It is the desire of the funder to find what the he wants to support.

I am saying this because, in this conversation, it is very easy to look at the outsider as the enemy. But it is also important at the same time, as a group, to think about the other. What is the funder looking for? It is not the brand value alone. In fact, most organizations that do funding do not start by looking at brand value. If they did, they would do something else. So I think it is important for us to also introspect and think about this question in a different manner. Otherwise we will reach the same conclusion that we are passionate and we have the right ideas, but there is somebody who has the decision making authority and he doesn't decide in our favour. Therefore the question: What kind of organization? What is the scale of growth?

The piston of an organization like us is growth. When we set up Eklavya in the 1980s, we would not think of it as there being a core and some who were project staff. But this is something which we are now all increasingly familiar with – that there is a core, and there are some people who are brought in for specific work and then they can be sort of parted with, like a contractor-owner model.

So the question that Rohit raised is important. We need to ask ourselves: When do we become owners of a structure which does not have the same intensity of purpose that it can convince people that this support requires consideration? It is important to look at that also. Otherwise we will end up on a note where we don't have any chance of moving forward.

Anjali: This whole process of institutionalization, if chosen, is important. Because in the NGO sector, often what leads NGOs to scale and equal, or maybe even worse, mediocrity, is going towards scale without processes of institutionalization. For example, you have support centres influencing schools for improving reading and so on. You take people – 12th Class pass or graduates – and they are able to do motivation and things to a certain extent. And then, with this pressure of expansion and influencing the system and so on, without the academic rigour, you push them into a different position. That needs to be taken seriously, and probably that's why Rohit used the word 'dangerous'.

Secondly, the task, the things that needs to be done to reform the system. For example, yes, we need research. But are we research organizations? There is a certain rigour for doing research, there is a certain way of selecting people who do it. I am totally with Keerti on the fact that field experiences must come up. But how do we do that with quality? To equip a research organization also requires institutionalization.

So which purpose are we choosing? Research may not be a purpose for a campaign. But something like school strengthening, improving attendance and the environment in the school can be a campaign. A campaign like what Sheeshpal said is very different from an institution doing curriculum development and research. Can the two be housed together?

There is one thing about the funders that niggles my mind – this thing of all funding organizations to fund a particular organization for a limited amount of time. If the purpose of the activity is over, then that's valid. But every funder says the same thing: "You are doing good work. You need to do good work. But our policy is, no more than this." So what are we getting at? Can funders also have some forums and maybe decide to continue, with some collaboration at the funding level? One can support research in one region, somebody else supports something else – but they continue funding for a long time. As it is now, they stop ten older organizations and look for ten new organizations. I have not been able to understand the logic of it. Even if there is quality they withdraw funding, even if there is purpose they withdraw funding – that's fine?!

Amit: We should look at ourselves within a larger framework. We live in a capitalist world within which is the democratic state that, until some time ago, liked to call itself a welfare state. Its responsibility was to take care of its people's welfare and focus on education, health and other such things. But the state failed due to various reasons, and wherever it failed, something called NGOs sprung up. What the state should have done and was unable to do, these NGOs stepped in to do. This is our logic.

In the last four-five years – and I have observed the developmental nature of the state for about ten years – it became a sort of right-based state. It will give you rights – right to education, right to information, right to work, right to food. So the state has accepted that it has no role in welfare. Its duties are restricted to providing security, policing, running the railways, giving out contracts and so on. The welfare work can be done by NGOs, or corporates through their CSR initiatives. The state will

just give you your rights.

We have to observe these changing state processes because we don't fit in there either. Let me now come to the inside dynamics of NGOs. As Bala was saying, we need growth for sustenance. Where does this argument come from? This is a capital based organization. Unless the capital grows, the meaning is lost, it is finished. So we are relating the argument about sustenance of capital to our own sustenance. If we look at ourselves from the side of capital, this will continue to happen. Questions will keep coming up, the state will not complete its tasks, and NGOs will continue to exist and work on the state's projects.

So we need to define our role in a different way. Are we going to continue our work like a patchwork in this capitalist and exploitative framework? That is, if there is a fire, we rush in to douse it. Then there is a fire elsewhere and we rush there. Is this all we should be doing? Or should we work on some basic changes that could change society, so it will not be necessary for anyone else to serve it in the future – society will be able to take care of itself. Do we want to create a society like that, or do we want to sustain our own systems? It is important to think about that.

There is a story by Kahlil Gibran that helps me look at this entire dynamic. I don't know its name in English, but it is about a devil and a godman, a padre, who meet. Then the devil is about to die. The padre is happy at first. He says, "It will be a good thing for the world if you are dead." But the devil tells him, "You exist because I exist." Finally, the padre carries the devil away on his shoulder to get him treated. So we have to see who we are.

Nomita: This doesn't address the question at all but the point that was brought up about NGOs getting rated – that is happening right now. The Ministry of Corporate Affairs allows you to apply for due diligence, which takes about six months – but you have to be working for three years for that to be done. You get listed on their site. And then CSR looks at these approved NGOs and approach you to fund your projects. I thought it might be useful for all of us to know this.

Anurag: I was pointed out as the only funder, so let me say a few things.

First of all, funders talk a lot amongst themselves. We don't like each other. We can't coordinate with each other because we have very different value systems, very different purposes. We'll end up spending a

lot more time trying to convince each other to do things in coordination than actually doing work. My assessment – you know me well – is that it's just not worthwhile, a waste of time. That's the reality.

Two is this that most funders don't want to commit long term because of various reasons. There is no one reason. One of the reasons is, well, we are not sure whether we actually have the money to keep giving it for ten years. So we don't want to make any such commitments. We want to make sure that the expectations are clear, that we will do it for three years and later see how long we continue. We want to make sure that we actually cut off at five years because we don't want to create expectations with other people that we will continue for 15 years. But all of it arises from a lack of certainty about the money that we ourselves have. Our approach is the judicious way of making sure that we don't end up making commitments or expectations that we can't fulfil. So that's one.

We have been giving many of our friends here grants for years and years and years, so I can say this without hesitation – a lot of funders cut funding because they are not happy. They won't say it to you, because it's not very easy to say such things, and one can always respond with, "But I did this, and you didn't tell me then." It all leads to bitterness. So why should we get into it? Again, that's the truth.

But I would say, a significant part of our stuff is to do with the first point – the lack of certainty. And please remember, my comments are limited to Wipro. It has nothing to do with Mr Premji's philanthropic work.

Lastly, this is a matter which all of you understand or know – a lot of funders are new to the game, so to say, and they just don't understand. They just don't get that things take a long time, a project could take five years.

But to me, the first point, which we don't talk about clearly all the time, is important. What is the certainty that Wipro will continue to do this? Eventually, we are a for-profit business, shareholder run. Why should we make commitments that we can't meet? That's the psychology that determines this kind of stuff.

Vishnu: I want to share a couple of observations about the very interesting discussion we had. We started with the question: Do we need to grow and scale? A lot of points that came out, though related to scale, were not directly to do with it. For example, the importance of research. To me, somehow we have been unable to convince people about the importance

of research and funding it. Typically, in countries that have got this right, there is a lot of public funding for this. Large private funding would be rare.

We do know the issues of the speed with which results are expected, of providing continuous funding that Anurag just talked about, and also the failure of organizations to come together to deliver on promises of NGOs and other bodies. So what is curious is that while we are talking of scale, there also seems to be a failure of being able to collaborate on solutions. If there was more certainty, or move towards certainty, perhaps that would address some of these issues.

The next question is related to maintaining the continuity of organizations in terms of the initial vision and missions which the founders may have had, the core beliefs and concepts – maintaining motivation and continuity in a changing environment. The environment may change inside the organization, or externally. This is primarily a how-to question. How do we maintain continuity of values, beliefs, mission and purpose, when there are forces external as well as internal to the organization which are in flux?

Hardy: It's how-to and also whether it is necessary, because we talked about structure and its continuity – given the fact that there are organizations set up which have people and therefore need to stay. One option could be that these things change as external and internal processes change. Or do we need processes and systems that sustain and maintain? And then, what are those possibilities that we can think of?

Rohit talked about the moral chip. What is that? How do we identify that and how do we keep it over generations?

Prasoon: I have for the past 17-18 years worked in project mode and got funding from different funders. It is true that at times we were not able to convince our funders about the amount and quality of work we had promised, and they left us.

One thing very striking is that whenever we work with the government, they ensure that whatever we are promised is delivered. But there is no money for that. We must accept it. And so, to attract funds, at times we make commitments which we know we can't be certain about. We commit ourselves to something and are not able to do it. So at the NGO or civil society end, we need to see whether we make commitments we can deliver or if we are exaggerating them. It is a matter for self-reflection.

Rohit: Let's consider two things together. One is keeping a certain kind of values, what I loosely termed as 'moral chip'. By the chip, people shouldn't understand something mechanical, here at least. And the second thing is, values and purposes and objectives also lead to change. But in the changing, there could be a bridge or a contradiction. Or, in changing, there could be a growth. So perhaps what you are asking is either maintaining, or a growth which comes consistently.

It seems to me that values and this kind of purpose come out of a world view. They are not entities that are free floating. They require a strong commitment. If it is something to do with education, then the kind of values we talk about require a strong commitment, and they cannot be indoctrinated. Organizations have to spend a lot of energy on that. When people come into the organization they don't share that world view, which means that there has to be some process by which they get acquainted with it. Slowly they develop conviction, or at least rationally they find it justifiable.

This cycle has to go on constantly. If the turnover is too high, or if there is not enough time, money and energy to spend on the newcomers, then by about the third day they will ask you to change the structure and the objectives and everything. If you say no, then they will say this is not democratic. So how many days should pass before these people want to change the very objectives? And what is the process before that?

I also noticed one thing that some of my friends may or may not agree with. When organizations start, there is a very high level of energy and commitment. Usually they are started by younger people. Therefore they can start discussion on some moral value at 8 o'clock in the morning, and if the issue is not resolved till 11.30, they might decide to order in some kachoris and continue their discussion in the morning. Now, when these people get slightly older, around 50, then this kind of energy isn't possible and that kind of freshness in exploring that new world of ideas is also not there. Therefore the organization itself starts getting somewhat lethargic, slowed down, and very sort of tolerant about these values, etc. Then the problem is how to maintain a group of high energy people who can continue this process.

The last thing I will say is, there are different times in society when there is this kind of process where newly educated graduates are ready to sustain something and find it excitable. If the atmosphere in the universities and higher education institutions changes and the package becomes important, then a different kind of world view or value system

is given by the university. And this new set of, say, ten people that you recruited into your organization in 2016 may not sustain that process which you were able to do in the 80s. Here, it is not the organization alone. It is the changing situation in society and changing value system. I don't know if, apart from spending energy, there is any shorter route to it.

Shubhra: There was something in the first part of the question about reorienting values. I have two experiences – not my own, but of two very well-known organizations.

One is CRY. It was founded by Rippan Kapur, whom I knew personally, and named Child Relief and You. At that time, it came more from a welfare approach. But he passed away at the age of 39, and I was witness to all the crises and ups and downs. Then, a lot of young people who entered the organization were extremely uncomfortable with the Child Relief and You. So they changed their name to Child Rights and You. The organization, at that point, turned itself inside out, because there was still a group of people very close to Rippan, who thought it was disloyalty in the extreme. At one time I felt that maybe CRY would not survive. But it has managed and it has emerged.

The second is even stranger. I had the good fortune of observing the Jesuits. I think they have been running good educational institutions for about 500 years? In the mid-80s, there was a change in the HRD (Human Resource Development Ministry) and the nomenclature of education was undergoing a change. They had a series of internal meetings. I was present at a few and I could see the way they could turn themselves inside out and how they were readying themselves. That is why they have managed to remain so relevant. It was a big lesson I learnt. Everything was laid threadbare and the kind of discussions and reflections that went in shows that is how they have survived.

So these are the two experiences I had, and in both cases they said they were doing it for their survival.

Keerti: I was thinking back on our journey of the last ten years. And in fact, even with the few groups that we interacted with, every six months, we have been different if you look at our reports. People who worked with us thought this was completely mind boggling. In fact, we even completely changed some of our values. I thought we were very fickle. What was going on? Why were we like this?

This was until I read Marie Clay. In her own programme, which is very

well recognized today, she spoke of change every six months. I am not talking of programme components. I am talking of the vision, because it is a dynamic field and we are responding. So I think, yes, after a certain initial journey, you arrive. I think now we feel that perhaps we have a level of some clarity in our vision and in our programme components. But that's the tension. I think that's the key, to build in the flexibility. Strict structures are important, but how do we do the balancing act between structure and flexibility, and maintain continuity? I don't have an answer.

Anjali: Over the last ten years or so, this whole sector has been now seen as one in which you make a career. What does a career in a social sector mean? This was not the discourse earlier on.

Even in Eklavya, there was a conscious decision that we would encourage people to move out and maybe come back in. But contrary to what it might imply, we have had long-term stability. Even among the recent entrants, more than five have stayed. That notion of continuity, that I am a regular employee... even the language determines a lot of things there. We never discriminated among anyone who joined – even as support staff – in the first ten years of Eklavya. Neither did we consider anyone an employee, nor did they consider themselves employees. But now, the idea of 'employee' comes naturally. The great structure... the way of great review... and the assumption that we are here continuously till retirement age... there were all these things. Sometimes these reduce the energy. Middle level people actually throw abuses at us, the older people – not just at us, but at a number of people. Others, those who have been recruited through this formal process of advertisement and so on, talk about work-life balance – eight hours of work is done, so we are done, and so on.

So we need to reflect: Do we want to make this a career path? Then this institutionalization process happens. I was quite impressed by this person who is running a library in Andhra Pradesh. Post-retirement, for the last 20 years, he has scaled hugely, with total voluntarism – no project grants, only donations. And the kinds of things he has built into that system are great.

So in this post-60 phase, when people are active, and in the under-30 post-student phase where they want two-three years before they get their main career, people could form an organization that is very different from the pyramidal long-term continuity organizations.

We need to really think out of the box. And I agree with Keerti that we

need to be more flexible because the world is changing faster and faster. Our assumptions of forming curriculum in the government schools' system held for the first 20 years. After that, more has changed after five years and ten years, than what changed after 20 years. The rate of change is faster. We try to build in long-term systems – a three-year committee or six-year committee – whereas every year things are changing. So we need to look at this flexibility versus continuity issue.

Anurag: Two minor points first. One is, I am taking my funder hat off. The second is that I am assuming that Rohit's moral chip is not supposed to be on the shoulder, because sometimes, the problem in this sector is that – that the chip is on the shoulder!

I am generally talking about all of us in this sector, therefore I am not talking from the Foundation's perspective. I feel that we need to spend a lot more time on our organization. So we work with the teacher, on curriculum development, etc., which is of course why we are here. If it is two of us doing this, then it is fine. The moment it is six of us doing this, it doesn't work unless we work on the organization.

Work on the organization means: How are people feeling about it? Whom are you recruiting? Why is s/he here, what should s/he do? Is s/he feeling happy? What are the politics between five people?

I don't think we spend enough time on the organization. Even for us, at the Foundation, it is quite a struggle. One significant part of working on the organization is to again use Rohit's word – but not just use his word – I think it is both the recognition and acceptance that all organizations have owners. A lot of you might disagree with me, but I don't think there are any organizations without owners – and I am using the word 'owners' in the way Rohit had used it. The owners might be one person, or ten persons, or 20 persons – it doesn't matter. But there are owners. Of course, if the organization has ten people then it becomes much simpler. But if it has 70 people, then it is more complex. But there are owners of the organization, and these owners have to work on the organization. One of the matters they have to work on is this matter of Rohit's moral chip. But the primary point in my mind is a deliberate, conscious effort to work on the organization, and recognizing that it is not a waste of time.

The second related point is that – all of you have said it in your way, but – I think all of this is just common sense stuff. Nobody has a solution for this. Every group of people struggles through this all the time. We can all validate for each other and share with each other that everybody

struggles. There is no template for small organizations or big organizations – nothing – because we are all talking about groups of human beings. And groups of human beings respond and react in certain ways, in general. But when it comes to the specificity of a particular group, there is no way that you are going to be anticipating what trajectory human behaviour will follow, and therefore, how the organization will develop.

So I don't think there is anything anybody can say about this other than all of us having the confidence that everybody muddles through – even if big, large. I worked for many years with General Electric, which is a 150-year-old organization. General Electric also muddles through. And, by the way, business organizations are also deeply bothered about values and purposes. They may be different values and purposes but they are bothered about them. The most insightful thing on this matter of this muddling through was said by somebody two-and-a-half thousand years ago – that the only way of solving all these issues is to meet very often, to talk, then go out and not change any decisions that have been taken when you met and talked, and to not take any decision outside when you are not meeting and talking. This is the only thing that is true.

The third point. All of you are working with or running organizations and you will know this, even if you are not willing to admit it to me, that no kind of extreme position works. We cannot be democratic, but we can't be undemocratic. We can't be transparent, but we cannot not be transparent. We can't not focus on the purpose, but we can't only focus on the purpose. This comment is not about everything that human beings do. It is limited to organizations. Extreme positions of any kind don't work. Very many of them are things that all of us very passionately talk about, and is very nice to talk about – the politically correct thing. Who will say we should not be transparent or that we should not be democratic?

But the truth of the organization is that you can't be. It is always the middle path. The moment, in the organizational reality, you tend to forget that the middle path is the only decision you can take, you get into problems. And then what happens is that you need organizational development. And the moment you need organizational development, it means that you have not worked hard enough on the organization.

Anwar: I agree with Anurag that we are not going to have any general ideas and general missions regarding this. There are always contexts and particular areas in which we are working, and therefore we have

to look for ways out in a particular situation. I just want to share the type of directions we have been taking for finding continuity, and finding continuity of motivation.

Many of us who came to work in certain places in Madhya Pradesh were looked on as 'outsiders'. In fact, they called us the Delhi-ites, people who drank tea with less sugar. So there was the Delhi tea and the local tea. One of the first things we learnt was about teamwork – that there should be a good mix of outsiders and of locals who had a different kind of understanding and gave a lot of value to continuing work in local areas.

Later on, we faced this problem in a big way, because of a lot of management oriented smarter people who came and went, especially for work in rural areas. They would be there for a year, or for a maximum of three or four years, and then go elsewhere. What we found was that if we, for some reason, developed a larger team from the local area and helped them to grow, that made a big difference. And if people started coming out from the team that was selected from the local area, then their level of interest and commitment to that area made a big change in the overall team.

We started doing it as a regular practice. In our group of 50-100 people, if they were given a chance – not just to learn but also to get into a channel of education – there were people who went from 8th Class to 10th to 12th, and there were people who went from college to MA to BEd or whatever. That would really give them a chance. They started taking up medium to higher level leadership – project coordination and so on.

It is terribly important to create strong systems for helping the education and growth of people we selected from the local area. The selection process might be very deep. You might have to decide how to find out who are the most motivated. But it makes a big difference. When you have a growing percentage of people from many, many small villages taking up serious positions, their commitment and the value they give back to the society from which they have come are enormous. An identity development of the whole society takes place – that we have a mentor, a guruji, who is managing a whole programme.

So I think we should look at that direction also – how we can commit to increase the capacity and the education of people whom we select in large numbers from local areas wherever we are working. That would give a different colour to the development.

Hardy: That was the last comment. I think we will close now. I just want

to pick out three strands which have been, to my mind, very central to this conversation. One is, of course, this not-on-the-shoulder moral chip, an understanding of which I am trying to process. Like a computer chip, it evolves, and it has certain things that are constant. But depending upon the programmes that are there, you can run many things on it. So the chip that we are talking about therefore – I think that's what I heard people say – needs to evolve. It does not need to become a chip on the shoulder.

The second thing, which was very important, is the work on the organization and the nature of the people in the organization. Anurag and Anwar spoke about it at the end, but it was there in what everyone said.

The last point I want to pick out is about these owners of the organization. I think this word 'owners' also needs to be understood and recognized. To my mind, the strength of the organization is to have more owners than employees. That is what makes any organization continue to pass on motivation, values and culture to itself. Somehow, in large organizations, the inability of the organization to stick to some of the basic tenets – some of which Anurag pointed out very, very well, that there are people who have responsibility and they should have the right to decide – within this sphere, what is their responsibility? It should not be that whatever is decided by the people whose right it is, can be changed after the meeting is over without consulting them or without their presence. It becomes a very ordinary thing to say. But if we think about ourselves as very intense and passionate people... at least I myself must have broken this many times.

If your ownership comes at the cost of the ownership of three other people, it's a very expensive purchase. I think the NGO sector needs to recognize this – that your ownership is important, but equally important is the ownership of the other people in the organization. So what I recognize is that there is no rule for the best way. There is no method. But there are these broad principles that I seem to think come from the identification of this moral chip – the recognition that this moral chip stays in people. That is the only place it will stay. So work on the people. Working on the people means having more owners, who believe that it is theirs and they have a responsibility and a right to be in it. And whatever it takes to increase that ownership, one should do.

Thank you. I think we will close now. It has been a very interesting session.

Wipro Applying Thought in Schools' evolving strategic priorities

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Anurag Behar: I am not going to start with the programme which is called Wipro Applying Thought in Schools. I will come to that last. I am going to talk about three basic things. One is some degree of clarification and explanation of the different organizations or programmes that you may be hearing of –Wipro, the Foundation, and Azim Premji University. Very many of you are more than familiar with them but some of you may not be. Then I will talk a little bit about the origins of this programme called the Wipro Applying Thought in Schools. And lastly, I will talk about the shift in approach.

Point one: What is this entire family of programmes/organizations?

The company Wipro is completely and entirely separate and different from the Azim Premji Foundation. The Azim Premji Foundation is entirely, completely, funded by Mr Premji's personal wealth. The company Wipro is a publicly quoted company, widely held by shareholders in this country and across the world. That is the most important distinction.

Mr Premji used to own about 79 per cent of the stock of Wipro, of which 40 per cent he transferred to the Foundation. So it is the Foundation's endowment or corpus – it doesn't eat into that corpus but works on the return on that corpus. The Foundation's corpus is the ownership of 40 per cent of the stockholding of Wipro. But we are not bound to keep the stock only with Wipro. We do judicious things to make sure that our endowment is invested in appropriate things – fixed deposits, this and that – so that we have a safe and secure return on our endowment and our operations can continue.

I will mention a few more things about Mr Premji's philanthropy and then come back to Wipro. That very large endowment funds all the activities of the Foundation. The Azim Premji University is part of the Foundation – in a sense, it is a division. Legally and structurally, Azim Premji Foundation is the sponsoring body in our Act on the University.

The University is a distinct legal entity.

The Foundation, including the University, is an operating organization, much like your organizations. We are not a grant making organization. We work on the matter of trying to help the public education system in this country improve. Within that, the University has a slightly broader charter. I am not going to go into that. But that's what the Foundation is focused on.

Two-and-a-half years ago, out of Mr Premji's philanthropy another organization was started, called Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives. That is a grant making organization, unlike the Foundation. It gives multi-year grants, much like the Tata Trust – however, not in education, in areas outside education, and even within that, in some carefully chosen areas. Currently, one of the chosen areas is support to not-for-profit organizations – only not-for-profits – working with vulnerable groups. I won't give you the full list but, illustratively, street children, urban homeless, teenage girls from disadvantaged communities, women at risk of violence, people with physical and mental disabilities... organizations directly working with them.

The other area is, loosely, the matter of local governance. We've not started giving out large grants yet. But that's the area we are focused on. How do we get the panchayats working better, and so on and so forth. We are just starting off with it. That's two.

Three, is in the state of Odisha. Of course, there are very many reasons why the state of Odisha has been chosen. The intent is to give grants to a number of organizations working with the government to try and reduce malnutrition, reduce the incidence of stunting.

Four, is done and dusted – meaning, we are finished with it. Along with a few other very wealthy people, the Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiative funded a trust called the Trust for Independent and Public-Spirited Media. You may have read of it in the newspapers, you may not have. But a fair bit of money has been given to that Trust, whose mandate is to actually fund media work which is public-interest oriented – the kind of stuff that cannot or does not get done in our current commercialized structure of the media world. But now, having funded it, that Trust is entirely independent. The Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiative has no role at all. It is an independent trust chaired by T N Ninan, and has a fairly illustrious board of trustees.

So that is the world of philanthropy of Mr Premji – funded entirely by him. From here on, I am going to talk only about Wipro. Of course, when

we open it up for questions, I can respond to questions on both.

Wipro started thinking about society and social stuff about 12 to 15 years ago. Before that, Wipro had done various kinds of things that normal successful companies end up doing: some stuff around the factories; there was a cyclone in Odisha and we built some shelters – Vijay was in Wipro with me at that time; there was an earthquake in Odisha and we went and did something. Things like that.

But I think it was in the period 2002-2004 – and again Vijay was fully a part of that initial thinking – that we actually started thinking about what we should do seriously about anything to do with society. Or should we do something at all? That was the first question. I can't take you through what all we went through in terms of the thinking process. But it's at that point in time that we decided we should do some things which are just contributions from our side towards a better society.

I'm deliberately using very simple words because that's the way we thought. We didn't have some very complicated or evolved ideas and notions of what we were attempting to do. But we said, "Oh, we are reasonably big and successful. Do we not have a view about this country and society? We have. So shouldn't we be doing something about it? Yes, we should."

That's how it started, really, which is why we don't call it Corporate Social Responsibility. We recoil at this idea of this being called Corporate Social Responsibility. That's the phrase people use to talk about it right now. We've never called it that. Most of my friends here, who have been coming here for the past 14-15 years, know that that's not the way we do it.

So we used to call it Social Initiatives. That is really the origin. It began with Wipro Applying Thought in Schools. So the first programme that we started thinking about was that it should be something with schools. What should we be doing? I think Maya and a lot of you who were there at that point in time said we should be doing something in schools while you did something with teachers. And that's how the initial idea of Wipro Applying Thought in Schools started. Since I'm going to come to Wipro Applying Thought in Schools in Point Two, I'll leave it here. I'll just talk a little bit about the evolution of this thinking at Wipro, and therefore what it means to us and what we think of it today.

In that period 2002-2006 we took a few crucial decisions from a Wipro perspective which has shaped whatever we do around this kind of stuff today. One decision we took was that we would focus our efforts,

not do hundreds of things. We'd basically focus all our social initiatives on education. One.

1b – and I am deliberately calling it 1b – was that in three years' time, we realized that we should do education but also environment. So as you look at us today, our Social Initiatives work, our engagement with wider society, aside from business, is really on education and matters of environment sustainability. They are the only two things that we do – nothing else.

I'll talk about what all we do in education and less on the environment side. But I must add a third angle now. I think the origin of this was in 1999-2000, but it sort of got crystallized subsequently in 2002-2006. Wipro employees used to come and tell us, "Our company is doing so many kinds of things. What can we do? How can we contribute?"

Now, Wipro Applying Thought in Schools, which is what we had at that point in time, is hardly the kind of thing where an IT professional could contribute. Or, by the time we had the environmental stuff, to the kind of things that we were trying to do there. That's how we ended up forming Wipro Cares. This is basically an initiative within Wipro which channelizes employee volunteerism. But, in a very curious way, what has happened is that over the past six-seven years, it has also become a very large platform for employees contributing their money, which is matched one-to-one by Wipro. So about 52,000 employees contribute to Wipro Cares every year, and the money is matched by Wipro. All that money, again, is given out to not-for-profits as grants, and the primary criterion is a certain degree of proximity.

So there are two things. One: There is a degree of proximity to where Wipro operates – around Bangalore, Hyderabad, Gurgaon and so on. Two: We have deliberately chosen a few areas which we think are particularly disadvantaged in our country, in the Northeast and Jammu and Kashmir. So we support work there as well.

I'll just wrap up education and then move on to Wipro Applying Thought in Schools. In education, these are the following things we do: we have Wipro Applying Thought in Schools, and we have a programme called Mission 10X. The Mission 10X programme actually works with hundreds of engineering colleges to try and help improve engineering college education. We do the work ourselves because we obviously have lots of engineers, a lot of whom actually have no work. So we just rustle them up and send them off to engineering colleges. I am saying this partly in jest but partly it's true.

We also have a very large programme – a fair bit of money commitment that we have made – in trying to help develop teacher capacity in the United States. Curiously, I have had the privilege of looking at the United States' education system very closely over the past four-five years. We do this work in Chicago, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York.

The international programme will expand. We will do something in the United Kingdom and so on. Why do we do that? Because we are part of a society we should do something. There is no greater funda than that. We started thinking, 50 per cent of Wipro revenues come from the United States, so why aren't we doing something there? So that's how this started.

Earthian is sort of a joint venture between our education work and our environment work. Basically it's a programme to create a greater degree of awareness about the nuances and intricacies on the matter of sustainability with schools and colleges. It's not an attempt to actually change thinking and change curriculum – not deep like Wipro Applying Thought in Schools. In fact, my only contribution to the Earthian programme is to keep these guys in check, saying don't make the Earthian programme deep like Wipro Applying Thought in Schools, because the intention is just to create a slightly deeper awareness than sending some mailers. But it's a wonderfully successful programme, in the sense that it has been able to reach out to a number of schools and colleges.

Particularly heartening is this very interesting turn it has taken over the past two years, I think, of holding a competition where thousands of schools give submissions on certain kinds of issues. One year, we had 'Can you map your school's water footprint?' We gave a tool to map the water footprint and they had to make a submission. Those submissions are looked at by an eminent jury every year.

When the schools and colleges win, there is a big function here and they get some money, and stuff like that. It's hugely exciting for these kids. What is most exciting is that in the past two-three years, we have these very wonderful schools coming from a village 40 km from Darbhanga, 20 km from Chauthan in Barmer, or some place of that nature. So it's a great thing – we enjoy it a lot. You are actually welcome to come to the Earthian event, which happens in the last weekend of January or the first weekend of February.

So that's the world of Mr Premji's philanthropy, and the world of Wipro's….

Now, to get to Wipro Applying Thought in Schools. I remember this

conversation that Vijay and I had. The teacher training programme we had started in 2002 was actually a brand building exercise, and we said this won't work. Either we should do brand building or we should do good work. We can't do both. Or, we can't do it together, for sure. Curiously, he and I were responsible for the brand and this stuff together. So maybe because it was him and me, we said we would dump the idea of the brand – which is held against us eternally inside Wipro – and try and do good work. That is how it got converted from a brand exercise to this effort to try and help change, or try and contribute towards changing education in this country.

We always saw ourselves not as a grant maker, not as a funder. Not that we were not giving out grants. If you call it by any other name, it is a grant or a funding line. But we never saw ourselves like that. We saw ourselves as slightly more than that – doing things like this, the Forum, and trying to get people connected. That has been a continuous struggle: "Can you please help so-and-so?" That never happens. It has never happened.

My colleagues Anand, Sreekanth and Prakash – the other culprits whom many of you know – are not here. They could perhaps have narrated it even better. But anyway, we never saw ourselves as funders. Those of you who are familiar with business will understand – we saw ourselves as venture capitalists. What venture capitalists do in the world of business is that they give money – that's what most people go to them for – but much more than that, what they actually bring together is a set of contacts, of networks, a sense of a community and that kind of stuff.

So we saw ourselves as venture capitalists because of this nature – that it's not just money, it is the other stuff that we will try and make happen. And of course, we've had very mixed success on the matter of other things. This Forum has really worked out – stayed 14-15 years, and very many of you keep coming back. Some things have worked out, some things have not. That's all right. But that's how we viewed ourselves.

And like I said, because I have already told you the origin, why does Wipro do this? There is nothing else beyond the fact that we somehow want to contribute towards a better India. What does Wipro get out of it? I don't think we get anything out of it. Everybody calls it WATIS – so nobody outside even knows that it's a Wipro thing.

Now, what we've been thinking about – and I'm going to my third point now – is that while we've been very happy, we have actually failed in one particular way, a significant way. If you look at this issue of a country of this size, this diversity, this kind of desperate need in education in all its

ways, where the systems that support the public education systems... In my view, I always think about the public education system as the public schools. I do not necessarily – and we can keep arguing about this outside, later – think of the DIETs (District Institutes for Education and Training) and the CRCs (Cluster Resource Centres) and the BRCs (Block Resource Centres) as necessarily being included in the public education system.

Nevertheless, the point is that the state this public education support system is in, we know how much effort is required. All of you, every one of your organizations is doing outstanding, wonderful work with different approaches. But how much effort is required? It's just extraordinary. We need a huge amount of effort. Like I said, among the many privileges of my life, one is that I get to see the US education system. The other is that I wear many caps. My day job is really the Foundation work. Therefore I get to see things on the ground every day. And we – meaning the education community, if we call ourselves that – are nowhere near the kind of effort that is required. I am not talking about our capacities, or the quality of work we are doing. It's just the amount, the number of people on the ground that is required... we're nowhere near there.

What Wipro Applying Thought in Schools has failed in – and I am deliberately using 'failure', this is the first time these guys will be hearing this – is that over the past 14 years, we have actually supported only 35 organizations. We've worked, in some loose manner or other, with 60-65 organizations but we have supported only 35. Now, that is a problem. And that is actually the starting point of the change in our approach. In very simple terms, our approach now is that if we have been able to support 35 organizations in the past 14 years, how do we support between 100 and 150 organizations in the next three to five years?

What is the objective? That if that is the scale that is required in this country, whatever little we can do, we will. Because we are a certain kind of an organization, we can't do everything. So whatever kind of an organization we are, whatever little we can do, we are going to change our approach and say we will do 100-150 over the next three to five years. That is the essential change, because then that drives everything else, drives a desire to go out and seek different, newer organizations.

It might be two individuals starting an organization, or an individual saying, "I have an idea." It might be an organization that has been working in health for many years and wants to do work now in education. It might be a bunch of outstanding people working in education – two-three people working for a while – but they themselves think, like I think Keerti

was saying, that they are now at a different stage and have to organize more, rather than being individuals. Organizations – or the idea of an organization or the idea of being organized – can happen at any stage. From our perspective, all that is fine. We are just going to go after them and try and support new organizations.

The past 14 years, we have been very happy about Wipro Applying Thought in Schools. But five years from now, if again we stand here and say that we ended up supporting only 25 organizations, then that is no cause for happiness. That's the basic shift in approach, and then the reason behind it.

I'll pause and take questions.

Q&A

Vishnu: Given what Wipro Applying Thought in Schools is today, what are the areas you think you can best support? In these new 100 or whatever organizations, what would you want to support, and what do you think you should not support – the kind of areas and the kind of support you provide?

Shashi Mendiratta: Would you be focusing on education and the environment sectors that you have chosen? Or would it expand into any other areas? And within education, would it be up to school, or go beyond that, into undergraduate level or so?

Nayan: Firstly, I appreciate the idea of supporting new and emerging organizations. But as you rightly said, even supporting 100-150 will be too little in a country like India. But have you thought of this kind of a vibrant community investing in that to become a voice on education in the country, like other communities? Like on Dalit rights, there is a community that voices out, and the government has to listen. So is that a kind of community that we can nurture through this process, with these 100-150 organizations, in becoming a voice on education in this country, which the government will hear, after 10-15 years at least?

Anurag: I will take the three questions now. Then I'll hear the rest.

First of all, thank you very much for calling it Wipro Applying Thought in Schools, not WATIS. Just two points, Vishnu. One is, this is what we

have done in the past is what we will continue to do in the future. We actually bet on people. So there is no other great stuff around this. Do we go wrong? Of course we go wrong. Have we gone right? We have mostly gone right. So we bet on people. That's one.

Two is this that, therefore, no area is a bar. Geography, curriculum, teacher capacity... none of it is a bar. Some things we are wary of. If somebody comes and says I want to do some stuff with – as you can guess – ICT (information and communications technology) with techno, ICT for education, I am very apprehensive. It doesn't work. However big it might be, there is no way that we are going to use it. So for some stuff, we are going to say that it is not going to work. So bet on people. Generally, anything in school education – that answers your question. School education, not undergrad.

Now, what support? Support is funding, clearly. It can even be a very small amount. Many of us have experienced that in the very initial phases, it is the very small amount that is actually the problem. Nobody is willing to give you six-and-a-half lakh rupees. Everything is in a very initial stage. When they have left Azim Premji University, many of my students say, "We want to do this, please give us some five lakh. Okay, if not five, at least two." Nobody gives two! And since you asked the question, I will say it in that manner, that's the kind of risk capital that is required.

So it's clearly money, and then, hopefully, access into this wider network. This includes whatever we can do from the Foundation. I have a very realistic assessment of what 'other stuff' can be. Connections, introductions and all that is fine. But beyond that, I'm not very sure. We have a notion that we will try and figure out whether, for a very young organization, we can provide support on HR. Can we provide support on legal and company affairs? Because that itself is a problem. How do you do audit? I am not talking about large organizations here. If you think back, when you started, all these were issues, right? So could we do that? Maybe we could... stuff like that.

But that's yet cooking. Like anything else, we'll figure out what to do. Undergrads? This is entirely focused on schools. And actually, Wipro Applying Thought in Schools is only focused on education. It's not in environment at all. The environment stuff is something else altogether, which I did not describe in this meeting.

Collective voice and all that… The country's biggest worthies in education are here. They don't need our help to have a voice. So the practical answer to your question is: I don't think we are going to do

anything substantially. Certainly Wipro will not do anything substantially. We are friends outside this. In our mind, this is the community, those of us who come to the Forum. We will debate, discuss, talk and go back. But outside this, we are not going to do anything.

Amit: I am slightly confused and trying to understand. You were saying that you will encourage new people to work. But what happens is that the nature of our work, however it might differ from one to another, has no scope for profit making. We can never be self-reliant, whatever we may do. Of course, there are also those who don't want to become self-reliant because that would affect the values of their work. There lies the confusion.

The people who support such initiatives – Wipro or WATIS or anybody else – after the first couple of years, they ask us to try and become self-reliant. And this is the problem. By the time we get to being self-reliant, we need to give up on our values, make some compromises or change our mode of working from what we had set off to do in the first place. So why does such a situation arise, where you say either get self-reliant or we will move our support to someone else? So I am not sure how much encouragement newcomers will get from this. What is your mindset? Why do you do this? Please explain.

Anwar: When you were talking about Azim Premji's philanthropic organizations…

Anurag: This side – not through Wipro.

Anwar: Yes, not through Wipro. When you were talking about it, you said they were also going to be supporting initiatives in local governance and panchayats. Now, when you say local governance, does that also, for you, include educational governance – because normally, the Wipro Applying Thought in Schools is more directed towards academic work and not towards community involvement or school management committees and things like that. So does that come under your concept of local governance there?

Anurag: Because this is a very quick one, I can respond right away. First of all, Wipro is completely separate from this, so let's not mix up Wipro Applying Thought in Schools here. No, Azim Premji Philanthropic

Initiative will not do anything with education, whether it is education governance or whatever. That's the Foundation's area.

Naveen: You had mentioned 35 organizations over 14 years. I was just wondering, what model of funding is this? Is this sustained funding over the entire period, or is it for certain project durations? The reason for asking the question is that, from the sense I've been getting from the earlier session, sustained funding seems to be a big problem to achieve long term objectives.

Ravi: I'm from the Innovation and Science Promotion Foundation. I have two questions. The first one is, are you considering something like a sandbox, wherein at least the new initiatives that are coming in can have a much easier environment to operate?

Anurag: No, we're not.

Ravi: The second question is, you talked about Wipro Cares. Can some of those volunteers be connected with the organizations for roll out and expansion activities?

Anurag: I'll respond to all the three questions. The earlier two are slightly related. I'll take the third one first. I wouldn't advise doing that at all. All these notions don't work. In this whole CSR effort, some of you must have dealt with people who are trying to sell you the idea that company people can come and volunteer for your work. But nothing works out. Please don't ever take that kind of help. Of course, paint the walls, hang some balloons and stuff like that – nothing else works. Wipro Cares has its own place. It's wonderful. But we won't do that. It's going to create lots of problems.

Those other two questions are connected. Our grant making of the past 14 years has been that there are organizations we have funded for three years, four years, five years. There are organizations that we have funded for all 14 years. So there is nothing specific. We have not given corpus and endowment grants. These have been project or programme based funding. But as very many people have been saying, our notion of project and programme has been very loose.

My response to Vishnu's question... Whether we say it clearly or not, we bet on people. We don't bet on programmes and projects. So okay,

there may be some programme or project which, on the face of it, we fund. But we are not necessarily fixated on the programme or project. So, as yet, no corpus or endowment funding. Some multi-year grants that have gone 14 years, some have lasted three to five years. That's what has happened.

How do we think of it for the future? It's quite possible that we think of some organizations as resource organizations. We might continue to support them in perhaps a smaller manner. That's one. But that's a very small set. Most of the money will go to new organizations that will eventually end up getting grants for a short first period and a slightly longer second period.

That's the current model. But please remember, whatever I am telling you about the new model – as you are familiar with the reality of life – will evolve. At this moment, our thinking is short first funding and, depending on other kinds of stuff, longer. I am not saying ten years – maybe two years or three years for second funding.

That is a problem, but we can't solve it. And we don't think of it in a manner that Wipro is in any way attempting to solve it. We are not even thinking that we will be able to help in thinking through it in this manner. If you ask me, I think that is the reality. What do we do about it? None of our individual organizations can do anything about it. I think – and this is the organizational development question that was being discussed earlier in the morning, and we will now discuss it again – I think the reality is what it is. One of the key parts of all of us who are thinking about organizations is, how do we deal with this reality in terms of raising funds?

So we have to all think about it. Wouldn't it be so much better for certain organizations if there was a tiered line of funding for the next 20-25 years? Of course it might be. We recognize it as an issue. But we are not engaged with it because I don't think we can influence it. We have no ability to influence that dynamic in the political economy of today. What we can do is what we are trying to do – that whatever little money we have, and whatever network we have, we will try and take what I call risk capital – which is, we will bet on people and people's work at a very early stage.

For example, that's the kind of work that a large grant making organization like the Tata Trust or Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiative may not do, because giving out a grant of five lakh rupees is meaningless for them, completely. But that is the kind of stuff we can do and will

do. It's a very big issue. We think we can't influence it. So therefore we recognize it, but we deal with it.

Nomita: So what are the challenges you see when you are talking about 150 organizations to start with, in one year?

Anurag: Not in one year. Over the next five years. And I must tell you this –100-150 number is a number we've pulled out of the hat. It could be 70. See, the comparison point is 35/14 versus some meaningful jump in the next five. So 100-150 is not some kind of a sacrosanct number. It will be wonderful if it is 250. But we won't be so disappointed if it is 75.

Devika: I think it is very uplifting, this idea that some new 100-150 people are going to be there, are going to be working and there is recognition for their work – all these new winds, new ideas which are coming. So there is a lot of happiness for that. But I was just wondering whether before starting on this new chapter, there can be some consolidation of work done by all the partners here. There is a lot of work done over these last 13-14-15 years, and we have been coming and meeting. I completely agree when you say that there is no fixed agenda – you are not looking for an outcome from the Wipro Applying Thought in Schools Forum. I am with that.

However, now that we are stepping into something different and new, can there be some effort where a few of the old-timers – and also a few of the newer ones who have been coming here – get together and try this enormously difficult exercise of consolidating the work that has been done, in some manner? And if there is a readiness for that among a few of us, then would Wipro Applying Thought in Schools look at that as a project to take on?

Rohit: I don't know if I'm about to ask or comment. But, you see, this idea of supporting people who are initiating some action on the basis of some thought – this is a great idea. And the small budget is also, to my mind, a very important idea. I suddenly remembered that the first budget for Digantar was 1,90,000 per year. The thing is, perhaps we should also study – within this Forum or somewhere else, or people like Anwar, Hardy or maybe the University – what made some organizations grow, enriching both ideas and action. And what made some other organizations not grow? That might help in your 150 or whatever, and in

your choosing and also seeding organizations.

Anurag: I will just respond to Devika. The simple response is: there is a 100 per cent failure rate in such stuff – meaning, all efforts at collaboration, getting together outside this meeting. We have had 100 per cent failure rates in the past 14 years. So I am not keen on this.

NOTES

The 16th partners' forum held in April 2016, was an opportunity for partners to share their experiences, reflections and insights from their work over the years, specific ideas and initiatives and their approaches to organization development. This publication is an attempt to share the discussions and debates at the forum with a larger audience.