Call for Abstracts

First National Conference
on
Factors of poor learning: challenges, opportunities and practices for learning improvement in socially diverse elementary schools of India

Date: 2, 3 and 4 September, 2016

Venue: India International Centre (IIC), 40, Max Mueller Marg,
Lodhi Estate, New Delhi - 110003

Context and perspective

India's classrooms increasingly reflect the socially diverse demographic reality of today. More and more children from socially marginalised communities, who make-up the demographic majority, are now attending elementary schools. According to the DISE report of 2013-14, SC and ST children's share in the total of elementary school pupils is 19.7% and 10.6% respectively. Likewise, the respective percentage share of OBC and Muslims children is 44.2 and 13.7.[1] These figures indicate that the enrolment of children from various marginalised communities in schools has increased significantly and, at present, reflect their demographic share. In other words, the enrolment exclusion is just about behind us, and the focus has moved on to sustaining retention in schools and ensuring that students achieve satisfactory learning results.

Recently, the poor level of learning in elementary schools has acquired a centre stage in both policy and academic discussions. Not only qualitative research, supported by rich anecdotal evidence, probe into various variables that are responsible for the learning status as it is, but a number of quantitative field data gathered from rich samples suggest that an optimal learning level is yet to take off despite concerted efforts and inputs that are supposed to improve the learning level of school children. One of such studies by the ASER centre established in 2014 that only 25% of all children can fluently read a Std. II text in Std. III. The situation is no better for Std. VIII children; a sizeable number of these children (approximately 25%) cannot read Std. II level text.[2]

Another study, by the Deshkal Society, in Bihar found that only 20.64 per cent of the Std II children could read simple two-letter words while 37.19 per cent is not even able to recognise the letters of the alphabet.[3] The Deshkal Society study highlights another aspect critical in this regard; it has disaggregated the composite data and unearthed the prevalent learning status among children from various social categories, including that of marginalised communities. Though the poor learning level cuts across children from all social categories, children from marginalised communities score much lower in the learning achievement count. The study shows that 46.02 and 47.12 per cent of Scheduled Caste children in Std. II can read nothing in, respectively, the districts of Gaya and Katihar. Their levels of

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[1]NUEPA. 2015. *Elementary Education in India: Trends 2005-06 to 2013-14*. New Delhi: NUEPA.

[2]ASER. 2015. *Annual Status of Education Report*. New Delhi: ASER Centre.

[3]Deshkal Society. 2012. *Findings of Household Survey and Baseline Learning Assessment of Children in Government Primary and Primary with Upper Primary Schools in Bihar* (Mimeo.). Delhi: Deshkal Society.

literacy trail far behind the literacy levels of their Upper Caste classmates in Std. II, of which only 22.37 and 23.64 per cent fail to read anything.

A range of systemic, institutional, personnel, pedagogic, and communitarian factors contribute to this state of affairs, which negates any reductionist approach that focuses on just one solution, informed by a single approach. A number of innovative initiatives are ongoing in the country in an attempt to integrate multi-pronged strategies and make them part of the conceptual framework of inclusive education and, in doing so, counteract discriminatory and alienating environment on the one hand, and strengthen quality learning processes on the other.[4] The different contributors to this conference will illustrate and analyse examples of contemporary efforts and achievements in the field of inclusive education.

With this conference, Deshkal Society aims to bring together multi-disciplinary approaches to explore, exemplify and elucidate the existing poor learning achievements of children from diverse social backgrounds. We seek contributions that offer comparative insights and research methods that intersect more than one discipline and methodology, involving educational research, policy as well as practice.

Objectives of the Conference

The proposed conference intends to:

- Explore and discuss the factors of poor learning and its linkages with social and cultural factors and challenges that beset socially marginalised children;
- Critically assess the challenges and current efforts to develop the social and pedagogical aptitude and ability of teachers to perform well in socially diverse classroom;
- Examine and learn from innovative inclusive classroom practices and the social context of their conceptual underpinning; and
- Build policy recommendations to promote the best possible approaches to learning for children from diverse social backgrounds, especially for those who are from marginalised communities.

Themes of the Conference

- Poor learning among socially marginalised children: Socio- cultural factors and challenges;
- Multilingual classrooms: Challenges, opportunities and innovative practices; and
- Social diversity and teacher education: Challenges, opportunities and innovative practices.

Expected Outcomes of the Conference

- Broadening of perspectives and practices for quality education that are embedded in relevant teaching-learning processes for socially diverse learners;
- Acquisition of exemplary lessons from evidence based learning initiatives and innovations that contribute to inclusive classrooms and pedagogic skills of teachers to improve the learning achievements of socially diverse learners; and
- Formulations of specific recommendations for policy and practice that help improve the learning achievements of socially diverse children.

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[4]Sharma, Sudhirendar. 2015. *Inclusive Education: For Enriching the Process of Learning*. Delhi: Deshkal Society.

The Conference will be designed in a format which blends technical lectures and plenary discussion sessions on the mentioned themes, followed by parallel sessions on related sub themes for a more in-depth exchange of ideas. We aim to provide an adequate space and time for experience sharing and dialogue in each session, involving both research and policy issues, which bring in evidence based insights to inform ongoing policy and program debates. The conference will bring together senior policy makers, academicians, practitioners and other relevant stakeholders from across India.

Last date of submission of abstracts

31st May, 2016 (only selected abstracts will be invited for presentation of the full paper). Kindly email your abstract to deshkal@gmail.com.

Hon'ble Members of the Core Group of the Conference

Dr. Arvind K. Mishra
Dr. Dhir Jhingran
Prof. Imtiaz Ahmad
Dr. Mahendra Kumar Mishra
Dr. Manoj Kumar Tiwary
Ms. Mini Shrinivasan
Dr. Peggy Mohan
Dr. Shushmita Dutt
Dr. Sudhirendar Sharma

Organised by

Deshkal Society, Delhi, (http://www.deshkalindia.com/) in association with Language and Learning Foundation, Delhi, (http://www.languageandlearning.in/) and Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs, Delhi, (http://iahub.iica.in/).

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