

"School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning. "

**A**cross a few hundred schools in India, there are teachers who provide relevant challenges to children, inspire them to ask questions, and dialogue about issues that impact their growing up years. Similarly, there are experienced educators who guide novice teachers to plan for multiple levels in the classroom and optimum utilization of school resources.

In several schools, there are also teachers who meet in small groups every week to evolve clarity about issues related to children's progress and the curriculum with department heads and the school head.

The examples quoted above do not exist in a vacuum. All teachers work in the contexts of their environment – the people, the resources made available for them, the nature of support provided to them, the vision of the organization (or the lack of it), the content of training and support made available at the school level, economic compensation for their work, and opportunities to read, reflect and share.

Behind every group of thinking and sensitive teachers are a few or more people who believe in the impact that teachers can make in a classroom and find ways to enable teachers to connect with children, with pedagogical processes and with the moral purpose of learning.



Beyond merely motivating teachers, they nurture ideas, identify issues, resolve tensions and enable systems, practices, beliefs, preparation and capacity building. They provide an intuitive and experientially learnt sense of 'educational leadership'. 'Educational leadership' as a construct and as an applied discipline of learning refers to developing and honing - through reflection, theoretical frameworks, enquiry, dialogue, planning and professional exchange - experiences related to leading educational institutions, people, systems, support institutions, and their management within and across institutions.

Unfortunately, for the bulk of India's school teachers, in government and private schools, rural and urban areas, the range of influences inside and outside schools can hardly be termed professional, nurturing or supportive. Of the more than ten and a half lakh schools in India, 60% of the primary schools are 2 or 3 teacher schools and therefore neither have an official position of a school head nor are they oriented to develop the notion of leadership for quality education. The government provides a position of a school head where there are 5 or more teachers. Where the position of the school head is available, the senior-most teacher, by date of appointment, is expected to fill the position with no training for leadership or management. Often, the school head position is not filled because of bureaucratic and political delays.

In private schools, the position of the head is usually filled keeping in mind the ability of the incumbent to be strong in 'public relations' which in effect is determined by the need to establish marketability of a school in economic and social terms. Parameters such as pedagogical interests, humility in leadership, and the ability to facilitate a differentiated curriculum is either not sought or valued. Consequently, in most schools, basic notions about educational leadership, support for teacher development, curriculum facilitation, and organizational management are non-existent.

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data entry, monitoring of schedules, report writing and testing assume greater importance than specialised aspects of pedagogical guidance, mentoring, management and knowledge development of teachers and school leaders. Failures in performance in senior school are often attributed to 'poor teaching' in the lower grades. There are no linkages established between the developmental needs of children and the design and management of the school curriculum. School teachers, heads and support organisations (CRCs, BEOs, DIETs) are usually unaware of inter and intra-organisational roles and are rarely able to visualise planning, preparation and change facilitation holistically. The school head is expected to learn on the job with little or no institutionalized support. Consequently, wide gaps exist in the interpretation of curricular needs, teacher preparation and team development throughout the school years.

In other words, lack of leadership training in combination with an amorphously defined position of the school head implies that there are no structured and reliable ways of developing accountability systems and practices (other than the narrowly defined board exam results). Absence of opportunities of learning about professional practices in educational leadership has also resulted in poorly defined relationships between school heads, education administrators, managers and policy makers. Other than the work of organizations such as NUEPA and a few SIEMATS, which also has been largely administrative, institutional

engagement for education leadership has been limited and sparse.

Studies reveal that what school heads do and how they lead others impacts the learning environment of schools and learning outcomes of students. The effect of leaders is largely indirect in improving school results and is considered the second most important influence in changing the school environment and the lives of young learners. Studies have also established that 'leaders achieve results through others' and that is the essence of leadership (Early and Weindling 2004, Leithwood 2004).

In the absence of defined notions of educational leadership, the study and impact of leadership on the quality of education provided in schools has received little or no attention in India. Therefore, organised opportunities need to be created to construct knowledge about institutional development in the context of the relationships that evolve between teachers, parents, students, the school head, the community and government functionaries. Leadership cannot continue to be dependent on charismatic heroes or dynamic visionaries. As a society we must learn to facilitate the development of communities of proactive leaders in education.

What prevents us from enabling school heads and administrators to learn about professional ways to support teachers in their roles as facilitators? While the obvious answers would be willingness to learn and provision of

Educational leadership as a method of enquiry, research, training and learning in programs of higher education and continuing professional development is by and large unrecognized in India. In parts of Europe, UK, USA, Australia, China and Singapore, a fair amount has been written about administrative and educational leadership. In the last few decades, theories of management and corporate training practices have immensely influenced the western discourse in administrative and educational leadership. With increasing influence of the corporate sector and privatization, notions of efficiency, measurable outcomes, target achievement and management have altered conventional ways of assessing achievement levels of learners, teachers and institutions. Owing to widespread criticism of the outcome and efficiency driven perspective, there has also been a conscious shift in the western world to bring into centre-stage pedagogical and humane aspects of education. Consequently, leadership is believed to encompass much more than administration and management. Leaders in educational institutions are expected to take on challenges to strengthen teaching-learning practices and provide sustained support for teacher development. They are expected to learn about enabling professional practices that support curriculum development, team leadership, accountability and supervision. The most commonly articulated expectation is to facilitate change and effectively manage the shifts that emerge with change facilitation. Terms such as 'transformational leadership', 'shared leadership', 'pedagogical leadership' and 'distributed leadership' are commonly referred to in leadership training, institutional development and change facilitation (Early and Weindling 2004, Fullan 1995, Harris 2002).

organized opportunities, closer examination reveals that impediments to change tend to be embedded in our cultural and institutional practices. The dominant set of constraints that prevent practicing and prospective educational leaders from exercising their roles with focus and sensitivity may be attributed to:

- a) The culture of the inspector raj
- b) Absence of institutional vision and support
- c) The teaching for testing practice

### The Culture Of The Inspector Raj

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Administrative structures in education operate in a vertical, complex hierarchy. For most states, the hierarchy under the Directorate of Education includes the District Education Officer, Deputy District Education Officers, Block Education Officers or Junior Deputy Inspectors. To decentralize control, under the DPEP and SSA, parallel positions were created for Block Level Resource Persons and Cluster Level Resource Persons. In some states and districts, the positions of the BEO and BRPs have been merged in terms of roles and responsibilities with continuing confusion about old and new profiles.

Primary schools are mostly under the supervision of junior officers who are usually regarded as 'generalists', while secondary schools are supervised by senior officers in the hierarchy who are referred to as 'subject-specialists'. Owing to a lack of coordination between officers responsible for primary and secondary schools there are no collective

attempts to improve school services in a community. Primary education is the most neglected because very few primary schools have designated positions of heads and the 'inspector or BEO/BRP' is not necessarily expected to be knowledgeable about supervising learning in the elementary years. With poor infrastructure and budget support, and high number of schools to supervise, the BEO is perhaps the most overloaded actor in the education system. In addition, the relationship between the school and the inspecting authority continues to be determined by historical baggage that largely consists of checking attendance and facilitating board examinations with high levels of secrecy. Today, where demands on schools are manifold and expectations far more complex, the inspecting authority has not transitioned to a supporting, supervisory role. The result is either minimal or fragmented supervision of schools.

Educational leadership as a practice can help educators and policy makers devise new structures of supervision and support through rationalization of roles, thoughtful staffing arrangements, adequate financial allocations, training for effective communication, and specific skills development for implementation of ideas.

### The Absence Of Institutional Vision

With weak or non-existent supervision and the absence of institutional vision at the block, cluster and school level, education is one of the most neglected sectors of our country. Other than the objectives provided by state or central government driven programs (Operation Blackboard, MLL, DPEP and SSA), schools rarely visualize or articulate their own vision. Not having a vision, a goal or an aim to work for with a moral purpose of development for a people or a community is tantamount to working in a void. Consider, for instance, the lack of imagination and creativity in most school programs and events. School functions are almost always imitations of past celebrations and a standard copy of what is acceptable by the block and district level officers. Little wonder that most school heads and BEOs treat their roles as secure government jobs where minimal effort becomes the fait accompli. Despondency and cynicism takes over bright minds and the committed. Support and guidance is made available for personalized administrative ends (transfers, sanctioning leaves, promotions) but not educational and cultural goals. Imagination and initiative, the hallmark of education and learning are scuttled.

Vision development and clarity about what we teach, why we teach, when we teach is particularly important for the diversity of cultures and schools in our country (Kumar 1992). The behaviorist approach to teaching has been the most dominant influence in school education in India. On the other hand, significant influences have emerged because of NCF 2005 and the work of several NGOs and a few university departments. At the same time, conflicts continue to arise in the minds of many teachers while dealing with the ubiquitous tensions between traditional and ever changing social values and relationships. The average teacher in government and private schools is ill equipped to deal with social tensions, policy demands and pressures to produce politically acceptable results with inflated marks and percentages (Bottery 2006).

The crux of enabling change in education is about evolving a vision and about developing capacities to realize the vision. Kai-ming Cheng reminds us that “vision-building is not only a matter of working on the individual school leaders, it is also necessary to work against a larger culture that does not favour vision development within individual schools” (1995). Visions evolve with time, experience, reflection and partnership. Effectively, “all practitioners and school leaders need a good deal of reflective experience before they can form a plausible vision” (Fullan 1995).

Educational leadership offers opportunities to train people to develop a vision for their departments, their roles and ways of functioning. It helps re-establish the very purpose for which the education sector exists – children. International practices in educational leadership are increasingly training to inspire, identify and develop cadres of leaders to provide pedagogical and visionary leadership to their institutions. Isn't it time that we develop home-grown contexts and understanding of how educational leaders can impact relevant educational change?

### The Teaching For Testing Practice

Teaching for testing has been the practice and culture for the bulk of government and private schools in India. The behaviorist paradigm of learning found its complimentary position with entrenched Indian hierarchies driven by patriarchy and caste. The result is a highly stratified educational hierarchy. As long as teachers are expected to teach to fulfill the demands of the examination system, the relationship between the teacher and the supervisory head

will continue to be inspectorial in nature. What is expected of the head (by the inspector/BEO) is demanded of the teacher.

Breaking the shackles of test-driven teaching implies being able to visualize change. To be able to visualize change, psychological, structural and functional spaces for change must be created. The ability to create such spaces emerges with dialogue, skills development and structural shifts. Educational leaders need to be equipped to initiate and facilitate meaningful dialogues. They need to be empowered to enable shifts in the interpretation and implementation of relevant curricular practices. They need to be trusted to be able to facilitate shifts that are meant for the good of the children and their teachers. For instance, where a school head feels that they would like to foster a reading environment, they should be able to source books that inspire both teachers and children. Visits to libraries and bookstores in towns and cities with colleagues a few times in a year would become essential prerequisites. Similarly, for teachers to recognize the value of regular fitness and sports in a school curriculum, they should be able to participate in outdoor programs that help build them their own physical and mental strengths.

As new curricular designs emerge across the school years, indicators and processes to assess the progress of learners also evolve. Dealing with multiple levels of learning would inevitably mean learning to develop multiple ways of transacting a curriculum. What works for some children may

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not work for others. Strategies used in special education may provide new insights to prevent learning difficulties in mainstream classrooms. The work of the educational leader is to help teachers identify and create multiple ways of facilitating relevance and meaningful for all.

In addition to the responsibility of designing new tools and processes arises the responsibility of communicating changes to parents and the community. The management and leadership of such experiences can prove to be a tall order. Trained educational leaders can foster innovations and enduring relationships to facilitate change in meaningful stages.

### Conclusion

Educational leadership as an applied discipline of learning offers tremendous opportunities for educators, academics and policy makers to establish overt and covert connections between the different components (or sub-systems) that constitute the system of education. By studying the interconnectedness between sub-systems, it provides frameworks that are more inclusive and accepting of multiple needs of the various actors in the education system.

The greatest challenge for an educational leader is to

develop viable components of culturally relevant standards of learning. In keeping with changing expectations of quality and performance, educational leaders will increasingly need to examine and debate the merits and demerits of standardization practices versus the possibility of developing locally relevant 'layered standards' (Sergiovanni 2001). Through research, professional exchange and policy analyses, educational leaders can prepare for changing curricular and evaluation practices, and social inclusion policies.

Altering traditional mindsets in school practice is not easy. Sustaining change is even more challenging. Visualizing change in stages will help facilitators and participants prepare for the directions in which change will evolve (Webb 2005). In addition to conviction building, desirable models of education require the development of systemic inputs inside a school and in the structures of the education system that exist to support schools.

Educational leadership is the most critical missing link in the journey for change in education and in society. Since culture and education are not static, learning about what works and how different components can be enabled to work more effectively is the prerequisite for leading change.

### Footnotes

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