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Regional Institute of Education, NCERT,

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE

ON

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF TEACHERS AND TEACHER EDUCATORS WORKING IN RURAL, REMOTE AND TRIBAL AREAS.

(2ND TO 4TH JULY, 2018)

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NCERT

Regional Institute of Education, Mysore

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

Executive Summary

Today teachers are crucially positioned for bringing about social transformation and building a society free of caste biases that have been the obstacles to the nation's growth. There is an urgent need that teachers should understand their strengths and worth that can be channelized for the establishment of a caste-free society. Teachers and teacher educators should not be a part of the caste divide; the caste system narrows the mind, Teachers and educational functionaries should become caste free and be a guiding light for the improvement of education, children and the nation. Teachers should mediate with community for creating a society that is free from caste discrimination. Teachers should play a role of humanists and nationalists. Though the caste system cannot be removed immediately efforts to remove inequalities in the society can be put in place, bridging the unfortunate social gaps that exists through the consorted efforts of teachers and teacher educators. Seventy years ago china was a very poor nation. Today China is far ahead of India in the economic progress despite having less cultivable land than India. In India, people have been spending their energies in repressing others because of caste system. If the energies are rightly spent even the upper castes would have been benefitted. Caste discrimination defies logic as for example the weaving community is untouchable in Gujarat while this is not so in Karnataka. Teachers must also work towards educating parents and others on the other side of the caste system to remove blemishes that have been posing hurdles to development. Teachers who are close to students can take the responsibility to prepare the younger generation to be a part of caste-free society, which also means an untouchability free society. There is a mismatch between a large country, an ancient civilization and the caste system. Caste system narrows the mind instead of thinking of 125 crore one large community people are dependent. This does not go with the needs of a large nation. Untouchability exists and one can see this in schools and it is most evident in educational institutions during the mid-day meals where plates and seating arrangements are done separately for different castes. Even in hotels, there are seating arrangements and utensils for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes. Once discrimination is rooted out, the economical levels of the country can move to optimal level. Teachers and caste discrimination and ill-treatment of children on the basis of caste is very much exiting in Indian educational scenario. There have been many instances of Dalit, Adivasi students being asked to sit in the Back rows in classrooms and of students being the lower socio-economic status being made to sit under no shelter. These issues showcase the inhuman side of the society in our nation. Teachers and teacher educators should be sensitive to such occurrences and ensure that such biases do not sneak into the classrooms and schools. Even today in rural areas of the country hotels are using separate cups, plates and glasses for the poor, lower classes although such practices are not seen in urbanized society. Therefore, caste discrimination affects the countries development. There is an inherent need for effective monitoring of the education system in general and teachers and teacher educator's role in our country. Monitoring system helps the growth of education. Research and studies on the educational status of leftwing extremism districts which suffer from illiteracy show that there was no supervision of educational status there over more than four decades. Education remained attention and one of the reasons cited for is lack of proper monitoring sytem and

lack of accountability. The three-day conference is a plat form to discuss issues and concerns of teachers and teacher educators to understand the roles and responsibilities of various institutions such as social welfare, tribal welfare organizations, educational organizations, educational functionaries, research institutes, university education departments to deliberate on the themes concerning to issues challenges of teachers and teacher educators working in the rural and remote areas. The findings of the conference will be shared among the various institutions and educational departments for wider dissemination of the findings of the scholars, researchers, educational administrative functionaries for further programmes. It is our sincere hope that the present report of some help to discuss and debate on the deliberations made and reported by various stake holders in conduct of their future programmes.

Prof. Y. Sreekanth

Principal Regional Institute of Education, NCERT, Mysore

Participants Attended the National Conference

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Contents

1. Introduction

India is a home to a large variety of indigenous People. The rural Population represents one of the most economically impoverished and marginalized groups in India. Education is one of the Primary agents of their transformation towards development. Education is in fact, an input not only for economic development, but also for the inner strength which helps to meet new challenges of life; it is an activity or processes which improves the immediate living conditions or increase the potential for future living. There are multiple issues and challenges confronting the implementation of quality education in schools and education institutions for the teachers and teachers' educators in the remote village and rural areas.

1.1 Difficulties for School Teachers

- There is no Coloration between tribal and non-tribal Children in schools
- Lack of Education awareness to Parent
- Irregularities of Children to School
- Linguistic Problem
- Family problem (Parents are addicted to alcoholically)
- Economical Problem (Under Basic Needs)

1.2 Difficulties for Teacher Educators

(i)   Teachers are majorly facing a problem on making the Tribal and Non-Tribal Students to get a unity all students of both sides makes a separation inside the class or school campus.

(ii)   Parents are mostly illiterate. As compared with the literate urban parents, rural student's parents don't know the importance of education so they do not give any attention related to education. So the whole responsibility of their learning falls upon the teachers.

(iii)   Parents are more concerned about raising their income rather than their children's studies. Due to their poor economic status, they compel their children to participate them in their earning process. And so the students are Irregular to school learning environment.

(iv)   While teaching the subjects teachers' faces on major issues of Linguistic on different tribal languages.

(V)   Some Parents are addicted for alcoholically even both father and mother. This kind of environmental in the houses makes a child to get disturbs and set a wrong path. Some of the parents fail to bring up their children with discipline. They are grown in such a way that they accept their children's wrong decisions.

1.3 Challenges faced by Tribal Communities

- Man and animal conflict
- Transport Problem
- Tribal Replacement (Changing the schools for higher Studies)
- Child Labor

Migration Problem Man and Animal Conflict is major Problem in Nilgiri Biosphere where the tribal communities should walk to their residence for 2 to 5Kms away from urban areas, where the animal's attacks and kills the human life even this makes to stop their education.

   (i)   Communities from rural areas they don't have proper Transport facilities to connect from urban areas.

   (ii)   After the completion of schooling, the students are not interested in pursuing higher education and they involve only in doing odd jobs.

   (iii) Some students are not focused on their studies, as they have to support their Parents financially. They are interested in earning money rather than learning.

   (iv) Media and some social conditions have a negative role in the life of the students. Most of students are addicted to drugs even at an earlier age. They also misuse the technological development due to lack of proper guidance.

   (v)   Due to lack of moral guidance students are affected by infatuation. They even stop their studies in the mid of the academics.

   (vi) As most of the students grow in insecure family conditions, they possess negative thoughts. They are not possessing problem solving techniques and courage in their life's difficult situation.

In rural areas, Public and Private sector is spending a huge amount for setting up a path for capacity building trainings for teachers, on this basis some of the Teachers union is stopping the programs on creating some different issues for their own profit. Some schools are overly packed with the students, leading to a distorted teacher- student ratio. It is impossible for teacher to pay full attention towards each and every student. Most villages have poor connectivity from one place to another place. Teacher educators have to maintain statistics and responsibility in overseeing teacher and their duties.

2. Issues and Challenges of Teachers Working in Rural and Remote Areas

2.1. Learning Outcomes of Children

Learning outcomes are assessment standards indicating the expected levels of learning that children should achieve for that class. These outcomes can be used as check points to assess learning at different points of time. Learning outcomes help teachers to understand the learning levels of children in their respective class individually as well as collectively. Learning outcomes should be the point of reference for conducting achievement surveys.

NCERT has developed draft learning outcomes for each class in languages, Mathematics Environmental Studies, Science and Social up to secondary stage. The Programme of National Achievement Survey (NAS) originally conceived by NCERT as an independent Project was in corporated into Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in the year 2000. The NCERT is responsible for planning, developing tools conducting the surveys and reporting the results under SSA by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD).

The Major objective of conducting National Achievement Survey is to know the achievement level of students studying schools at different stages of education. The NAS provides important insights as to whether the inputs made into the elementary education system had a beneficial effect or not. Such evidence is provided by the National Achievement Survey (NAS) carried out by NCERT periodically. These survey cycles not only provides policy makers, planners curriculum developers and other practitioners with a "Snap shot" of what students have learnt in are subjects, but also provides a baseline against which changes in educational standards can be monitored.

The National Achievement Survey (NAS) was conducted on 13th November 2017 for classes 3, 5 and 8 in Government and Government Aided Schools. The Survey tools used multiple test booklets questions in class VIII in Mathematics, Languages. The Competency based test questions developed reflected the learning outcomes which were recently incorporated in the Central Rules for RTE act by the Government of India along with the test items, questionnaires pertaining to students, teachers and schools were also used. The National Achievement Survey (NAS) was conducted on (3035) students in (112) schools in Siddipet District. The present paper analyses the National Achievement Survey (NAS) learning outcomes of VIII class students of Siddipet District.

2.2 About Siddipet District.

Siddipet is a newly formed district with 3 Assembly constituencies namely Siddipet, Dubbak, Gajwel and appended with small portions of Husnabad, Manakondur and Jangaon constituencies. The area of the district is spread across 3422 Sq.km with a population of 10,07,523 (2011 Census) and the density of population of 294 /Sq.Km. There are 399 Grama panchayaths , 22 Revenue mandals with three Revenue divisions namely Siddipet, Gajwel and Husnabad in Siddipet district. The literacy rate of Siddipet district in males is 72.76%, females 51.4% and the total 62.01%. It is lower than that of the literacy rate of the state of Telangana (i.e. 75.045 in males, 57.99% in females and total 66.54%). 1 Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, 228 Govt./ZPHS, 14 Model schools, 23 KGBVs, 1URS, 112 UPS, and 634 Govt./MPPS, 33 residential schools, 20 Junior colleges and 7 Degree colleges are functioning to cater to the needs of the education of the district

For analyzing the learning outcomes of students the average performance score of the students of 3rd class - 76.17, for 5th class students the score was – 60.51 and the score is 41.66 for class 8th. Hence, class VIII average scores are considered for discussion and analysis.

2.3. Distribution of Sample

Table 1: Sample of Students Drawn for NAS 2017 Gender Wise

S. No.	Gender	No. of students	Percentage
1	Boys	619	49.05
2	Girls	643	50.95
	Total	1262	100.00

Table 1 indicates that the sample selected for National Achievement Survey 2017. Out of 1262 class VIII students were drawn, 619 (49.05%) were boys while 642 (50.95%) were girls.

Table 2: Sample of Students Drawn for NAS 2017 Area Wise

S. No.	Area	No. of students	Percentage
1	Rural	1080	85.58
2	Urban	182	14.42
	Total	1262	100.00

From the table 2 it is observed that 1080 (85.58%) rural students and 182 (14.42%) urban students were selected as sample for NAS 2017.

Table 3: Sample of Students Drawn for NAS 2017 Caste wise

S. No.	Caste	No. of students	Percentage
1	SC	390	30.90

2	ST	42	03.33
3	OBC	789	62.52
4	General	41	03.25
	Total	**1262**	**100.00**

The table 3 indicates that the students drawn as sample for National Achievement Survey 2017. Out of 1262 class VIII students were drawn, 390 (30.9%) were SCs, 42 (3.3%) were STs, 789(62.52%) were OBCs and 41 (3.25%) were General category students.

2.4. NAS Results

Table :4 Average Performance of Class VIII Students Gender wise

Sl. No	Category	No. of students	Language	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies
1	Boys	619	45.39	38.62	42.77	34.78
2	Girls	643	50.44	40.15	47.53	40.39
	Overall	**1262**	**47.96**	**39.40**	**45.19**	**37.64**

In the table 4, it is observed that the language average performance score of Boys is 45.39 while that of Girls it is 50.44. Thus it can be understood that the average performance of Girls is more than Boys. The overall average performance in the language is 47.96. It is clear that only 47.96% of Academic Standards or Learning Outcomes pertaining to class VIII are achieved.

In the Mathematics subject, the average performance score of Boys is 38.62 and the score of Girls is 40.15. Thus it can be concluded that the average performance of Girls is more than Boys. The overall performance in Mathematics subject is 39.40. It is clear that the Learning out comes or Academic standards in Mathematics subject pertaining to VIII class are achieved only 39.40%.

The average performance score for Science subject of Boys is 42.77 while that of Girls is 47.53. The performance of Girls is better than that of Boys. The overall performance score in Science subject is 45.19. It can be understood that only 45.19% of VIII class specific Academic Standards or Learning Outcomes are achieved by students.

The average score for Academic Standards or Learning Outcomes pertaining to Social Studies subject in the Boys is 34.78 and it is 40.39 in Girls. It is clear that the performance of Girls is better than that of Boys. The overall average performance score in Social Studies subject is 37.64. Thus the VIII class specific academic standards are achieved only 37.64% by students.

Table 5 Average Performance of Class VIII Students Area wise

Sl. No	Category	No. of students	Language	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies
1	Rural	1080	48.50	40.45	46.83	38.49
2	Urban	182	44.76	33.15	35.62	32.56
	Overall	**1262**	**47.96**	**39.40**	**45.19**	**37.64**

In the table 2.2, it is observed that the language average performance score of Rural students is 48.50 while that of Urban students it is 44.76. Thus it can be understood that the average performance of Rural students is more than Urban students. The overall average performance

in the language is 47.96. It is clear that only 47.96% of Academic Standards or Learning Outcomes pertaining to class VIII are achieved.

In the Mathematics subject, the average performance score of Rural students is 40.45 and the score of Urban students is 33.15. Thus it can be concluded that the average performance of Rural students is more than Urban students. The overall performance in Mathematics subject is 39.40. It is clear that the Learning out comes or Academic standards in Mathematics subject pertaining to VIII class are achieved only 39.40%.

The average performance score for Science subject of Rural students is 46.83 while that of Urban students is 35.62. The performance of Rural students is better than that of Urban students. The overall performance score in Science subject is 45.19. It can be understood that only 45.19% of VIII class specific Academic Standards or Learning Outcomes are achieved by students.

The average score for Academic Standards or Learning Outcomes pertaining to Social Studies subject in the Rural students is 38.49 and it is 32.56 Urban students. It is clear that the performance of Rural students is better than that of Urban students. The overall average performance score in Social Studies subject is 37.64. Thus the VIII class specific academic standards are achieved only 37.64% by students.

Table 6: Average Performance of Class VIII Students Caste wise

Sl. No	Category	No. of students	Language	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies
1	SC	390	45.88	36.75	41.91	34.94
2	ST	42	47.62	37.30	41.27	36.51
3	OBC	789	48.95	40.70	46.95	38.81
4	General	41	49.11	41.63	46.67	41.95
	Overall	1262	47.96	39.40	45.19	37.64

In the Table 2.3, it is observed that the Language average performance score of SC students is 45.88, that of ST, OBC and General Students the average performance scores are 47.62, 48.95 and 49.11 respectively. It is clear that the Language average performance of General students is higher than that of SC, ST and OBCs. The language average performance of OBC students is higher than that of SC and ST students. The performance of ST students is better than that of SC students. The overall average performance in Language is 47.96. Thus it can be concluded that the VIII class specific Academic Standards or Learning outcomes are achieved only 47.96%.

In Mathematics subject, the average performance score of SC students is 36.75, while that of ST, OBC and General Students are 37.30, 40.70 and 41.63 respectively. Hence the average performance of General students is higher than that of SC,ST and OBC students. The performance of OBC students is higher than that of SC and ST students. The performance of ST students is higher than that of SC students. The Overall performance score of Mathematics Learning Outcomes of VIII class specific is 39.40. Thus we can conclude that the Academic standards in Mathematics subject are achieved only 39.4% in Siddipet District.

The Science Average Performance score of VIII class SC students is 41.91 while that of ST, OBC and General Students the scores are found to be 41.27, 46.95, 46.67 and 45.19 respectively. Hence the Average Performance score of OBC students is higher than that of SC, ST and General Category students. The Average Performance score of General category

students is higher than that of the SC and ST students. The difference between the scores of SC and ST Students is nominal and not significant. The difference between the average scores of the OBC and General Category students is also nominal and not significant. The Overall average performance score is 45.19. Thus, it is concluded that the Science VIII class specific Academic standards are achieved only 45.19% in Siddipet District. Pertaining to Social Studies subject, the average performance score of VIII class SC students is 34.94 while that of ST, OBC and General category students the scores are 36.51, 38.81 and41.95 respectively. Hence, the Average Performance score of OC students is higher than that of SC, ST and OBC students. The average performance score of OBC students is higher than that of SC and ST students. The performance score of ST students is higher than that of SC students. The overall Social studies subject average Performance score is 37.64%. Thus we can conclude that the Social studies subject, VIII class specific Academic standards are achieved only 37.64% in Siddipet district.

Issues and Challenges Faced by the Teachers:
The results of National Achievement Survey 2017 reveal that:
Language:-
- Students are facing difficulties in Reading textual material with comprehension.
- Students are not able to identify the details, characters, main idea and sequence of ideas and events while reading.

Mathematics:-
- Students fail to arrange given/collected information in the form of table, pictograph and bar graph. They were not able even to interpret them.
- Students are not able to perform well in addition and subtraction of algebraic expressions.
- Students facing difficulties in drawing and interpreting bar charts and pie charts.
- Students are not able to find out Rational Numbers between two given Rational Numbers.
- Students are not able to solve problems related to conversion of percentage to fraction and decimal and vice versa.

Science:
- Students are not able to conduct simple investigation to seek answers to queries.
- Students are not able to differentiate materials organism and processes.
- Students are not able to explain processes and phenomenon.
- Students are facing difficulties to measure angles of incidence and reflection, etc.
- Students are not able to construct models using materials from surroundings and explain their working.

Social Studies: -
- Students face difficulty to describe formation of land forms due to various factors.
- Students are not able to describe the functioning of Rural and Urban local Government bodies in sectors like health and education.
- Students are not able to locate important historical sites, places on an outline map of India.
- Students are not able to analyse the issues related to caste, women, widow remarriage, child marriage, social reforms and the laws and policies of colonial administration towards theses issues.
- Students are not able to apply the knowledge to the fundamental rights to find out about their violation, protection and promotion in a given situation.

Hence, there is a great need to throw light on the issues and challenges faced by the teachers in the class rooms.

- Special focus should be on practical or project methods of learning.
- The class rooms should not be in mechanical or stereo type of teaching methods. There must be a plenty of scope for conducting different types of activities inside or outside of the class room.
- The curricular and co-curricular activities conducted in the school will develop self confidence among the students.
- The project works assigned to the students under CCE should be practical in nature. They should develop practical knowledge of the students.
- The cut and paste method of doing projects should be avoided.
- The students should collect information, organize the data, analyze the data, synthesize the data and interpret the results.
- Proper training to the teachers on CCE or practical oriented methods should be imparted.
- The curriculum and textbooks should be reviewed periodically to incorporate necessary changes.
- Necessary facilities should be provided in all the schools for enabling joyful learning.
- The schools atmosphere should be student friendly and every student should be provided opportunities to take part in all the activities of the school.

Teacher and Tribal Residential School: Social reflections from Nilgiri hills, Tamil Nadu.

Tribe is an ethnic group characterized by a collective self-image and a wide range of commonly shared cultural traits. In India, the Constitution considered the Scheduled Tribes as a weaker section. The Government conceived the need to evolve ways and means for gradual adjustment of the tribal population to changed conditions and their slow integration in to the general life of the country without under and hasty disruption to their way of life. The founders of the Constitution and other well-wishers felt that education can broaden the world view of tribes, equipping them to meet the present day challenges. To promote literacy among tribal children, the Government has introduced Tribal Residential schools in interior tribal areas with hostel accommodation. Teachers in such schools have issues and challenges. This paper seeks to examine the issues and challenges of teachers and teacher educators working in Government Tribal Residential (GTR) schools, located in remote tribal areas in the Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu. The Nilgiri district is a hilly area located at the junction on the Eastern and Western Ghats amidst the boarders of Kerala. Karnataka and Coimbatore District. The tribal groups found in the district are Todas, Kotas, Irulas, Kurumbas, Paniyans and Kattunayakans, who are notified by the Government of India as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTGS). There are 25 Government Tribal Residential schools in the district, located in all six taluks of the Nilgiris. The study was conducted with social anthropology approach and the data were collected through in – depth interviews and care study. The study concludes that in tribal school the teacher has a massive social role than mere teaching.

3. **Issues and Challenges Faced by District Educational Officers with Teachers Working in Rural and Remote Areas**

One of the greatest challenges India faces is rural poverty and education. After six decades of democracy, rural schooling has shown little improvement. Collectively the article illustrates the complexity, interconnectedness and intractability of the challenges that face rural schools and education in India. This study has focused in grounded theory building, with the focus on the challenges and complexities of principals in the areas.

3.1 Introduction

One of the biggest concerns of educators across the world, and especially in India, is making the present generation learners future-ready. India is relatively young as a nation with around 28 million youth population being added every year. More than 50 per cent of its population is below the age of 25 and more than 65 per cent are aged below 35. In 2020, the average age of an Indian is expected to be 29 years, while it will be 37 for China and 48 for Japan. However, India's high youth population won't be of help to the economy if universal education is not achieved all over India.

The main problem India now faces is that all the pedagogical innovations are fit to improve the quality of urban education while the rural learners and their education remain largely neglected. With 65 per cent of the population residing in rural India, education there truly deserves much more attention, especially when it is plagued with so many problems - dearth of teachers, teacher absenteeism and poor quality of teachers.

3.2 Rural Schools Defined

The definition of rural still eludes us because the term is ambiguous and the distinction with urban tend to be arbitrary, thus no concrete definition has been agreed upon. It should be noted that India has diverse rural areas and therefore certain social, economic, educational and cultural factors need to be considered in enhancing the definition of rural education. Rural schools are the schools in the outskirts of the country. Some use the concept synonymously with the concept farm school or small school.

The following featured are examples of the rural profile (UNESCO, 2005):
- Distance to towns;
- Topography, (conditions of roads, bridges to school, etc);   Access to information technology;
- Transport infrastructure (roads, buses, taxis);
- Access to services and facilities (electricity, water, sanitation);
- The health , educational and economic status of the community; o Access to lifelong learning services;
- Social conditions in the community;

The issues and challenges faced by District Educational Officers with rural Teachers are enlisted below:

3.3 Issues and challenges

1. Rural Areas Are Not Attractive For Teachers

Rural schools find it difficult to attract good and suitable teachers, because there are less financial resources available. It is known that the ideal rural teacher at basic level must be prepared to teach multiple grades or subjects, organize extra-curricular activities and adjust well to environment and the community. Notably, it is extremely difficult to find teachers who fit into the rural community.

2.Late or Blatantly Absent

Lack of accountability of teachers and school authorities has raised the rate of absenteeism. School Development and Management Committees (SDMCs), comprising parents and members of the local community, have been entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing teachers and their duties. However, research suggests that the committee has hardly seen success.

3.Lack of Supervision

In Telangana at Mandal Level, Mandal Educational Officers supervises the Schools under their jurisdiction, because of legal issues prevailing in service matters of appointing Mandal Educational Officers posts are not filled on regular basis. One of the senior Headmasters are acting as Mandal Educational Officers. Due to playing of dual role they are unable to justify this additional duty. This problem is prevailing for more than 15 years. Because of which grass root level school monitoring and supervision is seriously hampered.

4.Lack of Quality Teacher Training

Apart from few Government Institutes there are many private teacher-training institutes in India, but the quality of the training they provide is unsatisfactory. Continuous professional development is a motivator for teachers, and enough attention is needed in this regard.

3.4 Quality and Access

Quality and access to education is the major concern in rural schools as there are fewer committed teachers, lack of proper text books and learning material in the schools. Though Government schools exist, but when compared to private schools then quality is a major issue. Majority of people living in villages have understood the importance of education and know that it is the only way to get rid of poverty. But due to lack of money they are not able to send their children to private schools and hence depend upon government schools for education.

3.5 Enrolment

Some of the government schools in rural India are overly packed with students, leading to a distorted teacher- student ratio. In such a situation it is impossible for teachers to pay full attention towards each and every student, even if they are willing to help.

3.6 Socio Economic Background of Students

Quality related issues are far powerful than poverty. Students are not at all encouraged to think but they are asked to memorize pre-defined questions for exams. So for many students clearing examination at the end of the session, passing their exam becomes more important than gaining knowledge. As per rules in Telangana every student is supposed to be promoted to the next class irrespective of marks in their examination till class X. Hence majority of students do not bother to study, which means a decline in their education level. Neither students nor teachers take any interest in studies which is why the level of education is declining in India despite many efforts. The effects of poverty have been demonstrated on many aspects of life, from education to health, life outcomes to self-esteem. Any discussions regarding education and how school variables affect students' attainment of education cannot be divorced from poverty, which encompasses poverty of the learners, their families, and the community that inevitably
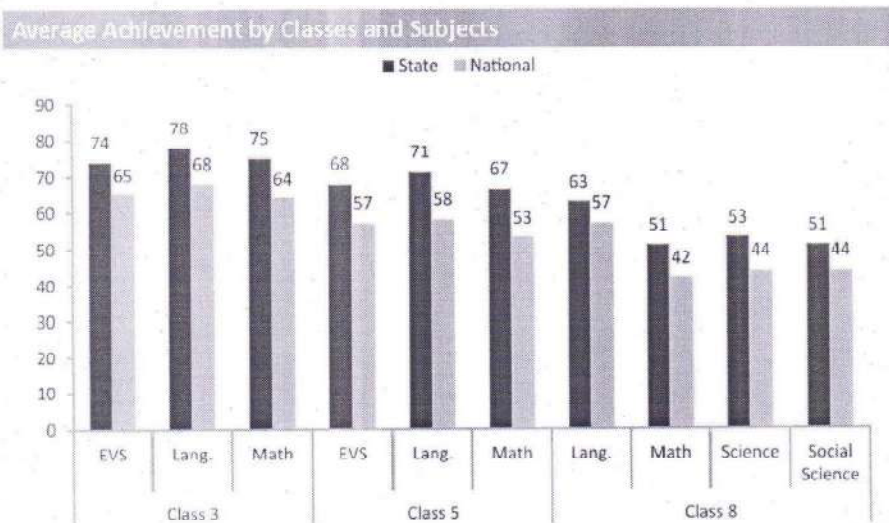
leads to poverty of the school. Poverty is an issue that more and more of our nation's children are coming face to face with. The price that children of poverty must pay is unbelievably high. Increasing numbers of children enter rural schools with needs from circumstances, such as poverty, that schools are not prepared to meet.

Rural schools constitute a significant proportion of Indian schools and schools districts. So it is imperative that their needs are taken into account. The government cannot singlehandedly solve every educational problem in rural settings. But it can leverage its role in ways that improve outcomes for the nation's learners in rural geographic areas. The promise of education law is to ensure that all learners have equal access to a high quality of education. That promise cannot materialize if certain geographic segments of the population are not equitably served by the education system. If we do not take a step up, Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals will only remain a dream.
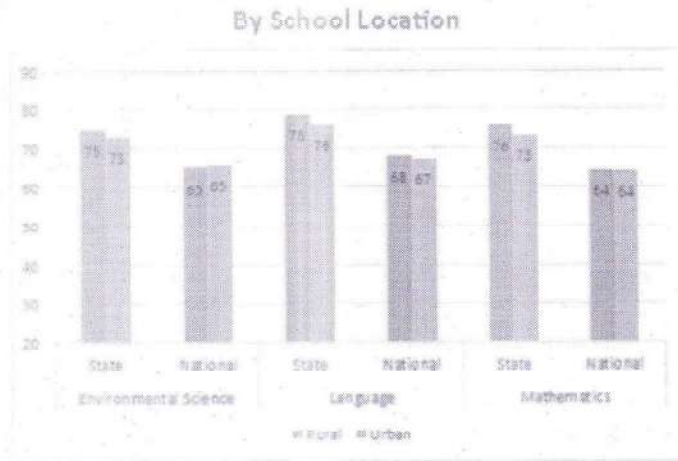
4. Systemic Issues and Challenges of Teachers and Teacher Educators Working in Rural Areas

There are systemic issues and challenges that all the teachers and teacher educators all over the country face. They are the problems of teachers and teacher educators working in rural areas too. However, this paper will try to look at the topic from two perspectives which are expressed in the following questions. 1. How are the general issues felt across the system reflect on the system in rural areas? And 2. What are the issues specific to rural areas? The discussions in this paper are based on the author's extended interactions with teachers, and teacher educators from all over Karnataka and student teachers and parents from Mysore and Dakshina Kannada districts. Let us first take up issues related to the learning of children.

The yearly reports of SSA and RMSA activities from districts surely show lots of progress in terms of providing physical infrastructure. But academic achievement still remains wanting in many subjects. A look at the NAS report (2017) provides many insights into the achievement pattern of children.

Average Achievement by Classes and Subjects
State / National

	Class 3			Class 5			Class 8			
	EVS	Lang.	Math	EVS	Lang.	Math	Lang.	Math	Science	Social Science
State	74	78	75	68	71	67	63	51	53	51
National	65	68	64	57	58	53	57	42	44	44

The rural, urban comparison shows the following pattern.

By School Location

Similarly comparison of performance by gender shows the following pattern.

By Gender
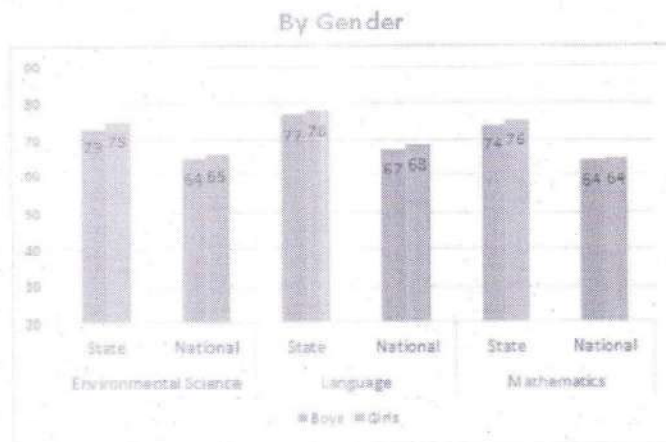
Contrary to a general assumption that urban students perform better, we find the rural students performing better in NAS. Also, the performance of girls is slightly better than that of the boys. These results give rise to several observations and questions. The rural students may not be so disadvantaged as we assume them to be. When given opportunities girls can show performance equal to or better than that of boys. The reducing performance as children move to higher classes perhaps indicates the lack of learning skills that are required to take on studies at the higher classes. What are the conditions under which the rural children have been able to perform better? Do the better scores of girls indicate increased gender parity? What are the causes of reduced performance levels at the higher classes? What do they indicate – low teacher quality, burden of syllabus, rote learning, lack of study skills and basic content knowledge? The issue of reducing performance needs further probing. The reasons for such results seems to have its roots in a few systemic issues. 1. Misinterpretation of no detention policy – a general feeling that 'its ok whether classroom learning takes place systematically or

not, anyway they are going to pass'. So children get promoted to higher classes without even learning the basics of subjects. Now the system seems to think that the 'no detention policy' does not work and it wants to revert back to yearly promotion schemes. We brought the 'no detention policy'. But we did not develop a thorough understanding of what it implies among teachers and parents. Now we want to remove it all of a sudden without even probing into the real causes for the failure of a system that an informed person would have really appreciated. There are several examples of the same type. Karnataka is hotly debating over the open book examinations now. The project learning which was brought along with the trimester scheme in Karnataka has come to stay but in a 'cut and paste' form. 2. Inadequacy of teacher preparedness to work with learners at higher levels.

Though this is a general issue, the urban students always have opportunities to grow beyond what the school offers as they have scope for interaction with their peers across various types of schools. The rural students are isolated. So the percentage of marks is everything for them. The challenge before the teachers in rural areas is to create more and more opportunities for their students to get exposure to various dimensions of learning. They also have to speak to the parents on a continued basis about various issues about their child's learning. Urban parents have a better access to different human and material resources which the rural uneducated parents lack. Nevertheless, they have expectations.

Academic discussions and policy documents have talked much about community participation in the school processes. Training programmes for SDMC members, VEC members, programmes like 'Samudayadatta Shale (School towards community) in Karnataka have tried to encourage more and more participation of parents in the school processes. As a result, the school community linkages have been strengthened. But has this progress led to qualitative improvement in educational standards? What type of contributions are the parents able to make to enhance the quality of school processes? Are the schools able to meet societal expectations? Are those expectations academically acceptable?

When we analyse like this, we realise that the increased community involvement has no place in academic performance of students. Communities simply expect results. Their involvement stops at that. Schools are not in a position to fine tune the expectations of parents. The community does not have the patience to learn from schools why children need learn in a particular way and not the other way. Parents demand teachers to give homework, punish children who do not complete the tasks given, attend to their children personally and so on. The issue here is that parents speak in a binary language. For them it is either English medium or MT medium. It is either a very high percentage or low achievement. There is no other intermediary option. English medium schools are opened under such conditions. Coaching centres are opened to satisfy the demands of parents for high percentage. Naturally schools too resort to result oriented techniques and the true educational processes fail. For the English crazy parents even boards that show their child's school as an English medium school is good enough to assume their child will be able to speak and use English very well. Such simplistic equations are the real issues that challenge the teachers and teacher educators who strive to promote quality in the education imparted in schools. These equations continue even to higher levels.

What the society expects from the educational system and what the education system provides seem to clash. While the state run school stand for all the ideals that philosophy of education speaks about, quite a number of schools run by private agencies cater to "the needs" of the society. They become popular and finally seem to form the benchmark for quality. This situation needs a thorough analysis because all our dialogues with the community appear to fail because of this dichotomy. There are several dimensions to this issue. Between what the

school system should ideally give and what it is expected to give, lie the reasons for the various issues that have grown into serious concerns in the system. Further, these are to be analysed contextually, especially with respect to rural areas. Mere connectivity may not ensure its proper use. Parents and students need to develop awareness about using the connectivity too. Developing this awareness among the members of the rural community is the challenge before the teaching fraternity.

Imitation of the urban school culture seems to be another issue in the rural areas. The urban schools have school's buses and so should rural schools. The urban children wear shoes and ties and so should rural children. That walking in nature could be a value does not appeal to the rural parents who have seen education in the urban schools. What they have understood is urban type of education which they think is real education. They need to be informed. This task appears trivial. But it topples the very identity of rural children.

Government has declared many incentives to students who belong to backward classes. Students from the rural areas truly benefit from these schemes. The government allows students who have their family income below a particular level to enjoy the benefits of these schemes. All students from the rural areas whose parents work in the unorganized sectors produce income certificates showing that their annual income is below the level specified. While their need for support is well appreciated, forcing them to declare false income cannot be accepted. This happens because of the unrealistic rules governing the income levels to be eligible for incentives. What value are we talking about in schools?

Children who study in rural schools have a different socio-cultural and economic background as compared to the urban children. Has the system prepared teachers to respond to their personality needs, learning requirements differentially? We have common training programmes for teachers at the state level. The examples of taking children for a nature walk might be useful for teachers working in rural schools but not so much for urban teachers. Similarly examples of various types of trades, industries, business transactions which have an urban background may not mean anything to rural students. Teachers will have to be trained to understand student background first and then plan learning activities for them. Student backgrounds might change from one rural area to another. Though rural children might have agriculture background, students from dry belts will have a different life style from those who come from irrigated lands. How do teachers attend to these varied needs of children? We need to understand this phenomenon thoroughly and work out solutions.

The midday meal scheme has given rise to a few castes based problems. The higher caste groups do not want their children to eat food cooked by lower caste people. How do teachers tackle this? There is no one single answer. Perhaps teachers need to be empowered to talk to the community, open sustained dialogues with them and changes might be visible after a few years.

The habit of finding administrative/management solutions to academic problems is another area of concern. This happens because our education system is very large and administration of such a large system is challenging. The administrative or management view of educational growth is again result oriented. Administration wants to see some tangible outcome to ensure that the system is working properly. But we need to realize that the school processes might change from one area to another depending on their locations. But we do not have a differential plan because monitoring becomes difficult with differential plans. Creating a common textbook is a typical example of finding an administrative solution to an academic issue. This affects

the rural children more as they have varying backgrounds. The system has to be socially and politically geared to take reforms with respect to using teacher made texts and sustain it.

In this regard, among the issues that are under debate, the following could be more keenly pursued.

- *Planning differential inputs both for teacher training programmes and enabling teachers for the same at the school level.*
- *Opening dialogues with the local community on a continued basis on what education should do. This should aim at developing awareness of the political dimensions of educational processes. Empowerment of SDMCs will have to be done keeping in mind local needs.*
- *Enabling meaningful use of connectivity*

Lack of a coherent vision of education seems to be the core reason for all these systemic issues. Perhaps we need to rework on our own vision of school education, educate the school communities and make them realize what they need to expect from the educational system. It might appear that we need to start from the beginning. The other option is to help society unlearn. Between the two trying to walk in the right path appears to be a sustainable option.

5. Enhancing the job Proficiency of rural pre-service teachers. A Case study of Budding Teacher Programme.

There is an ongoing deficit of quality teachers apart from the growing number of vacancies (generated by many factors like a revision of teacher-pupil ratio forced by Right to Education Act, improvement in school enrolment by a more aware community and also the retirement of teachers). The global demand in 96 countries is 1.9 million more teachers required in the classroom to reach the goals of EFA. Karnataka has 59,428 primary and higher primary schools. with an expected teacher-pupil ratio of 1:35, the number of teachers required is about 1,90,000. Diploma in Elementary Education (D. El.Ed) is the basic qualification needed to be a teacher in a primary and higher primary school in Karnataka. Very few teachers passing out of D.El.Ed is employable. With the spurt of Private school in the last 5 years, the demand for quality teachers has increased the main fold. It is in this context, we at Vivekananda Teacher Training and Research Centre(a unit of SVYM) had initiated an innovative programme called *Budding Teacher* for capacity building of pre-service teachers to be employable in schools. In this paper, we share our experiences from the case study of Budding Teacher programme.

5.1 Vivekananda Teacher Training and Research Center (VTTRC)

VTTRC is an educational initiative of Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement (SVYM). SVYM has been active in the education sector since the founding of Viveka Tribal Center for learning. which has been providing contextually relevant and contemporary education to more than 400 tribal children annually since 1988. VTCL, as well as other government-run Ashram schools in select tribal hamlets, have faced challenges in selecting teachers who have the necessary competency to facilitate learning amongst the socio-culturally unique tribal children. The VTCL and VTTRC are located near Hosahalli Tribal Hamlet in the fringes of Bandipur National Park about 90 KMs from Mysore. The main focus of VTTRC is to enable tribal & rural youth to acquire a formal qualification in teaching with a special focus on creative teaching. This not only promises to improve the quality of learning outcomes amongst rural children but also provides much-needed employment opportunities to the younger generation of tribal and rural youths.

5.2. Objectives of VTTRC
- To build teachers who are creative, value-based, critically analyse, have good communication skills and can use modern technologies in their classrooms
- To train teachers to have a research-oriented approach to solve the problems faced by students in elementary education
- To demonstrate the functioning of a Centre of Excellence in Teacher Education and create teachers who are role models for the marginalised communities.

5.3 Genesis of Budding Teacher Programme
- Evolving of Actives in the Education sector of SVYM- Demand for Quality Teachers.

The education sector of SVYM has evolved since the inception of Viveka Tribal Center for Learning, a tribal school during the 1990s to have residential teacher training college, a CBSE school, Mobile Science Lab, Pre-university College, Scholarship programme (Viveka Scholar) for meritorious students from the economically weaker section, Science TiT Bits (an app for teachers). All these activities reiterate the need and demand for quality teachers in rural areas.

Delivery of D.El.Ed Curriculum.

The present curriculum document focuses on the outline of the D.El.Ed programme for two years, curricular areas and activities. To reduce conceptual load and promote meaningful learning, emphasis is placed on integrating theory with relevant practical activities, intensive classroom discussions and reflections and formative assessment practices. In the present scheme of things, it has been visualised that there would be opportunities for developing skills along with theoretical inputs in preparing humane and professional teachers. This document visualises that the teachers at the elementary level should be capable of understanding the unique responsibilities at both the lower primary level and upper primary levels. Source: Chapter Two, The Karnataka Elementary Teacher Education Curriculum2016, revised. Since 2006, VTTRC has been focussing on different aspects of teacher learning with the vision to develop humane and professional teachers for the nation.VTTRC offers two-year D.El.Ed curriculum, which follows the curriculum prescribed by DSERT of Karnataka. The curriculum lays emphasis on integrating theory and practice along with preparing humane and professional teachers for primary and upper primary level. In order to achieve this, the curriculum was transacted with 4 aspects:

1. *The syllabus of D.El.Ed curriculum as per the norms prescribed by NCTE in terms of Foundations of Education, Pedagogy of Subjects and Practice Teaching/Internship.*

2. *The school Attachment programme allows to D.El.Ed. students to work practicum aspect of the D.El.Ed works with the school children on day to day basis.*

3. *The Budding Teacher Programme: An eight-month mentoring partnership with Schools and school teachers after the completion of 2 years of D.El.Ed. programme.*

4. *The Teaching-Learning Center: which provides training, enrichment classes and learning resources to ashram schools in H.D.Kote Taluk*

5.5 Features of Budding Teacher Programme.
The Budding Teacher Programme provides a platform for D.El.Ed trainees to work with some of the best Privately owned schools under the mentorship with senior teacher or principal. During the period, each trainee receives a stipend of Rs.3,500 per month. The Budding Teacher programme consists of three major components:
- **The Training component:** About 30 days training on Spoken English, ICT, Content Knowledge and Documentation of their experience.

- The School Mentoring Component: 8 months of Internship with Schools, where students work with the mentorship of Senior teachers or school Leads.
- The Job Placement: The job placements is the final phase of the training, where schools are invited to campus for placements

5.6 Impact of Budding Teacher Programme.

One of the impacts of the budding teacher programme was interns of increase in enrolment of students with more than 80% of girls seeking admissions to pursue D.El.Ed. course. We found that there was an increase in enrolment of students as a result of budding teacher programme. Please refer the following table on enrolment trends of students in the last three years

Year	First Year D.El.Ed	Second year D.El.Ed	Budding Teacher Programme	Total Number of Students
2015-16	32	18	15	65
2016-17	33	19	16	68
2017-18	40	32	24	96

The job placement of students for the first two years were up to 80% indicating the impact of the programme. We were able to see a strong relationship between enrolment of students and campus placements of the students.

5.7 Implications of Budding Teachers programmes for Teacher Education

We found that though the curriculum of D.El.Ed has emphasised on practice as a core of Teacher Education curriculum with the emphasis on 50% of the time on practicum, internship and Practice Teaching. However, we found that students have to take the complete responsibility of the teachers through immersion in the school for a prolonged period of time in the specific school context. This immersion experience with the mentorship of senior teachers in the schools enhances the self-esteem the students. The self-esteem of the students goes up they were keen and ready to enter the teaching professions thereby enhancing their own job efficiency. We believe this will facilitate the expectations of the curriculum set by DSERT to prepare teachers with increased responsibility to work with children with lower primary and upper primary levels.

6.The Teacher Makes the Change

In 1958, Jawaharlal Nehru said, "Today tribal groups, which number more than 40 million, require special attention from the government even though they live largely isolated from the national culture. The main question is whether tribal societies can enter the national mainstream while preserving their distinct social, cultural and political beliefs." The role of education in the process of social progress and in creating a level-playing field for all communities to enable them become an integral part of the national mainstream cannot be overstated. The detrimental impact that lack of education has had in stifling progress is particularly severe in the case of

marginalized sections such as Scheduled Cases and Scheduled Tribes. If we consider the literacy rate, we can see that, although the gap between the overall literacy rate and that of the Scheduled Tribes has been narrowing over the past few decades, according to the latest Census (2011) it is still at more than 14%. Thus while 73% of India is literate, the figure for the Scheduled Tribes is 58.96%. This becomes a significant number when we consider that 8.61% Indians (more than 104 million) belong to the Scheduled Tribes. It is against this background, and in the light of Article 16 of the Constitution, which enables the Central Government to make special provisions for the socio-economic development of the deprived sections, as well as Article 350A, which 'affirms that every state must provide adequate facilities for instruction of pupils in their mother tongue' that this paper puts forth a case study of an initiative in the Anaikatti region on the outskirts of Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu.

6.1 Vidya Vanam Model: A Case Study

Vidya Vanam believes that a fear-free environment is imperative to learning and growth and, therefore, provides high-quality basic education that is contextually relevant and culturally appropriate to the children of this area. The curriculum, pedagogy and methodology were evolved to allow children to learn with the sense of inquiry and the joy of discovery. The tool used for this is theme-based learning in which a theme is selected and studied from every subject and artistic angle, whether it is academics, music, dance, art or craft. The same theme moves through every level with added information and demanding enhanced competence. The lesson plans are prepared so that the required skills for the level are accomplished with the help of material generated or sourced by the teachers. There are no prescribed textbooks until class VIII. Instead, the teachers source material from the library, which is equipped with more than 4000 books. This encourages teachers to be creative and not depend on the textbooks entirely. The content in textbooks, especially for languages, is usually urban in nature, so there is need to include locally relevant content to make learning more meaningful. This integrated studies approach, based on collaboration with the learners, is a new organizational model for some teachers. It can be threatening to those accustomed to a more traditional model, because the teacher no longer has control over the curriculum content. The teacher becomes a participant in the learning process and more of a coordinator or facilitator. Many teachers have lesson plans but remain flexible and allow students' interests to lead the unit in unexpected directions. Though this gives students a greater voice in the topics they study and the strategies they use, the teacher's role is not diminished. Young people still need teachers to help them reflect on their learning and to make connections between what they knew and what they have just learned. An excellent strategy for teachers is to plan thematic units with a colleague. Sharing ideas, reflecting on activities, developing resources, and planning activities affirms the skills of both teachers and provides an opportunity to build on each other's expertise to create something that neither would have accomplished alone. Teachers benefit from the interchange of ideas when they work collaboratively. Another strategy is creating multi-age groups by combining the student population in ways different from the usual grade/class. The sense of the school as a community is enhanced when teachers and students from different classes become acquainted and when students work with others of different ages. Interpersonal relationships between teachers and students are improved when authority is put aside, and teachers become collaborators and mentors rather than lecturers. Of course, the teacher retains ultimate control over behaviour and is accountable for ensuring that students are engaged in worthwhile projects that extend skills and result in increased knowledge and positive attitudes. The movement toward student-directed learning is not a movement away from responsibility; instead this responsibility is shared with students. This provides a bridge between the traditional model of teacher-directed learning and segregated subjects to a more innovative way

of planning units of study. *Education is a human right with immense power to transform. Education is the premise of progress in every society and in every family. On its foundation rests the cornerstone of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development Kofi Annan.* According to the Indian Constitution, "Every person who has his domicile in the territory of India and (a) Who was born in the territory of India; or (b) Either of whose parents was born in the territory of India; or (c) Who has been ordinarily resident in the territory of India for not less than five years immediately preceding such commencement shall be a citizen of India." However, this does not seem to apply to the tribal population. In 1958, Jawaharlal Nehru said: "In the past, many tribal groups were forced to assimilate into the dominant culture of the country. But some groups, such as the Bhils, Gonds, Santals, Oraons, Mundas, Khonds, Mizos, Nagas, and Khasis resisted change and assimilation to maintain their cultural identities and languages. According to many Indians, their continued isolation poses problems to national integration. Under the banner of national unity, the government is now bringing these minority groups into the national mainstream. The main question is whether tribal societies can enter the national mainstream while preserving their distinct social, cultural and political beliefs." This remains true even today. One cannot over emphasise the role of education in helping these communities become an integral part of the national mainstream. Lack of education has had an especially severe impact on marginalized sections such as Scheduled Tribes. Though the gap between the overall literacy rate and that of the Scheduled Tribes has decreased in the last decades, it is still more than 14% according to the 2011 Census. So while the literacy rate for India is at 73%, the figure for the Scheduled Tribes is 58.96%. Why is education important? It opens up economic and job opportunities; strengthens people's democratic voice; helps tackle health issues; increases awareness of fundamental human and legal rights; and also to recognise and reduce caste and class inequalities. For example, in states with a high literacy rate, the people actively demand access to health facilities and other services from the government. Today, when we talk about development, most people tend to think of the economic aspect alone. It is not just about job opportunities or building roads and bridges. Development, when applied to all aspects of human life, not only meets basic needs but also offers opportunities for socio-cultural growth. Let us now study the struggle that tribal children face when trying to enter the mainstream schooling system. *Access and Infrastructure:* Though education has been transformed in recent times due to use of newer technologies in the classroom, this has not penetrated into rural, particularly tribal areas. Though the government has attempted to introduce smart classrooms in its schools, factors such teacher absenteeism and lack of infrastructure like electricity, water and sanitation are impediments in their successful implementation. Also many tribes live in forests and areas that do not have government-run schools and, as a result, lack any kind of access to education. *Prejudice and lack of sensitivity:* It has been my experience that most teachers dismiss tribal students as incapable of learning. Even worse, they look down upon the tribal language and culture and treat them with contempt. I was told that it was a waste of time to try to teach them anything. However, studies have shown that there are other factors that are responsible for the drop-out rate of tribal and marignalised children. Children from these communities are first-generation learners who do not have much support in the home environment. The teacher's insensitivity and contempt for their language, culture and knowledge base increases their fear that is already embedded in their psyche through generations of oppression. Teachers do little to help them overcome this fear. Given this background, and in the light of Article 16 of the Constitution, which enables the Central Government to make special provisions for the socio-economic development of the deprived sections, as well as Article 350A, which 'affirms that every state must provide adequate facilities for instruction of pupils in their mother tongue' that this paper puts forth a case study of an initiative in Anaikatti, a village on the foothills of the Nilgiris and on the outskirts of Coimbatore city of Tamil Nadu.

6.2 The Vidya Vanam Model: A Case Study

Vidya Vanam is a school for the children of the Irula tribe that lives in the villages in and around Anaikatti. Established in 2007, the school has developed a unique pedagogy that was developed through interactions with the community. I came to this area in 2002-03 to work with the balwadis and anganwadis here and began to interact with the people of 13 villages, some of which were situated deep inside the forests. I realised that any possibility of holistic education for these children had to incorporate the tribal cultural and socio-economic system that was already established. Sensitivity to tribal culture and life and recognition of their cognitive strength and appreciation of their personality was absolutely essential. One of the primary concerns was the language. The Irulas had their own spoken language, which does not have a script. Schools insisted on them learning the State language which was unfamiliar to them. In addition, English is also part of the State curriculum. This situation was overwhelming for the children. R Vaidehi, a teacher from the Irula tribe, addressed this problem in her classroom by giving the children freedom to express themselves in the language they were comfortable with. This reduced the fear of classroom interactions. Vidya Vanam welcomed this new perspective and adapted to create a trilingual and non-immersive environment up to Std III, as far as language is concerned. From Std IV, children are encouraged to use the medium of instruction but are not penalised or punished for using any other language. Teachers from non-tribal communities are also encouraged to speak in the tribal language, especially in junior classes, to create an inclusive environment. The curriculum, content and the teaching-learning methods were also reorganized to include the tribal knowledge base and environment with inputs from teachers from the community. Another teacher Uma Maheshwari collected songs and stories from tribal folklore for use in her Tamil class. Some of these stories and songs were specific to this area. For example, one song spoke about 25 varieties of greens that once grew in the forests of Anaikatti. Another song named many trees, some of which were familiar to outsiders also and some that were endemic to this region. Similar lists were found naming birds in this region. All these were later included as support materials for the regular curriculum. Bringing this into the classroom was as a way of empowering the tribal children and legitimizing their knowledge as part of the 'mainstream'. The curriculum, pedagogy and methodology were evolved to allow children to learn with the sense of inquiry and the joy of discovery. The tool used for this is theme-based learning in which a theme is selected and studied from every subject and artistic angle, whether it is academics, music, dance, art or craft. The same theme moves through every level with added information and demanding enhanced competence. The lesson plans are prepared so that the required skills for the level are accomplished with the help of material generated or sourced by the teachers. There are no prescribed textbooks until class VIII. Instead, the teachers source material from the library, which is equipped with more than 4000 books. This encourages teachers to be creative and not depend on the textbooks entirely. The content in textbooks, especially for languages, is usually urban in nature, so there is need to include locally relevant content to make learning more meaningful. This integrated studies approach, based on collaboration with the learners, is a new organizational model for some teachers. It can be threatening to those accustomed to a more traditional model, because the teacher no longer has control over the curriculum content. The teacher becomes a participant in the learning process and more of a coordinator or facilitator. Many teachers have lesson plans but remain flexible and allow students' interests to lead the unit in unexpected directions. Though this gives students a greater voice in the topics they study and the strategies they use, the teacher's role is not diminished. Young people still need teachers to help them reflect on their learning and to make connections between what they knew and what they have just learned. An excellent strategy for teachers is to plan thematic

units with a colleague. Sharing ideas, reflecting on activities, developing resources, and planning activities affirms the skills of both teachers and provides an opportunity to build on each other's expertise to create something that neither would have accomplished alone. Teachers benefit from the interchange of ideas when they work collaboratively. Another strategy is creating multi-age groups by combining the student population in ways different from the usual grade/class. The sense of the school as a community is enhanced when teachers and students from different classes become acquainted and when students work with others of different ages. Interpersonal relationships between teachers and students are improved when authority is put aside, and teachers become collaborators and mentors rather than lecturers. Of course, the teacher retains ultimate control over behaviour and is accountable for ensuring that students are engaged in worthwhile projects that extend skills and result in increased knowledge and positive attitudes. The movement toward student-directed learning is not a movement away from responsibility; instead this responsibility is shared with students. This provides a bridge between the traditional model of teacher-directed learning and segregated subjects to a more innovative way of planning units of study. Having said this, I would like you to hear directly from Vidya Vanam's teachers about this system is implemented. Prema Surendran is the Junior School Coordinator; R Vaideshi is the Middle School Coordinator and Uma Maheshwari is the Senior School Coordinator. Vidya Vanam's classroom processes are an integration of Montessori and Constructivist principles. The school also has a grassroots engagement with the communities around it. The approach is bottoms-up and theme-based learning helps children to make sense of their lived reality and apply acquired scientific knowledge. This pedagogy requires sensitive teachers who also need to educate parents and the community about the desirability of this democratic teaching-learning process.

Recommendations

1. Different challenges and opportunities abound in every rural schools community. These challenges and opportunities often are left unattended by policymakers and others. Yet there is little that our nation can do to change our overall education picture of it leaves behind rural schools, learners and communities. This study concludes with recommendations to improve the conditions of rural schools. We need to find solutions to meet the Education for All goals in making recommendations to improve the conditions of teachers and teaching in rural schools.

2. Many researches have shown that the quality if teachers in our classrooms is the most important school-related factor in boosting learners' achievement (Lewin, 2004). Therefore, policymakers must put mechanisms in place to support and promote the retention of qualified and competent teachers in rural schools with a view to improve the quality and working conditions of teachers in rural schools.

3. To attract and retain teachers in isolated communities, they should be compensated with additional financial incentives, in the form of hardship allowance, travel allowance for teachers to go to rural areas.

4. The effectiveness of rural schools in producing quality learners lies in a good teaching environment. This is a missing gap that the government must fill to enable rural schools to face the challenges.

5. Further, teachers should be able to utilize information communications technology (ICT) as teaching and learning tools. ICT and open and distance education programmes

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can be used to expand and enhance learning opportunities for allowing them access courses not available in their school and interact with learners attending schools in other communities.

6. If electricity is still not accessible, alternative sources of generating electricity can be explored. Therefore, to achieve the Education for All goals, the government must urgently address the issue relating to the provision of adequate infrastructural facilities and teacher capacity building.

7. Government must act to guarantee the safety of learners and teachers in rural schools. Rural schools also struggle with drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, and gang activity. Parents must also be encouraged to help to tackle these issues in the school. After school programs are one way rural schools and communities can work together to provide a safe place for learners and to build on classroom learning.

8. A good education is often the only means of breaking the cycle of poverty for poor children. These children need an education that is founded in high standards and high expectations for all. Being able to identify and understand learners who are at-risk is critical if we are to support their growth and development.

9. Headmasters in rural schools have more than their fair share of work. Headmasters in rural schools are overloaded and need more assistance to serve the schools in the manner best serving the learners. School districts must step up to the task of providing more assistance to the rural school principal. Local leadership should include professional development training and support for Headmasters to attend workshops and conferences.

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