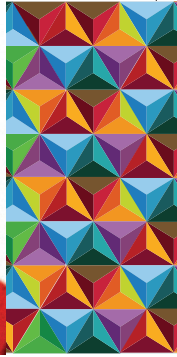


## Delhi Education Revolution: The 'Pragati' Series

Anju Ghavri



The public education system of Delhi has been on an overhauling spree since the current government took over political leadership. Someone who has been working in the system for the past fifteen years can chalk out beautifully the trajectory of the revival of public education system of Delhi. The journey has been phenomenal.

I have witnessed the Delhi Government School System as an insider since 2003, when I joined one of the Delhi government schools as a primary teacher. I moved on to become a Trained Graduate teacher of Mathematics in 2008 and am currently working as a Lecturer in Commerce in addition to working as a Mentor Teacher, the flagship project of the Delhi Government which constitutes a team of 200 highly motivated and committed teachers to facilitate the academic and systemic changes in the department.

Let's start from the beginning, when the poor infrastructure and filthy surroundings were the face of the Delhi Government Schools. The schools looked pathetic and were completely unwelcoming for both teachers and learners. The quality of education and transaction of content had degraded to the extent that , during 2015-16, the pass percentage of class IX was only 49%. All the stakeholders felt helpless as the problems were vicious in nature. There was an urgent need of a series of strategically well-coordinated reforms.

The newly elected government took charge of the situation and roped in a few advisory bodies, who had rich experience in the similar field. The first year was marked for refurbishing the hardware of the system. New buildings and classrooms were constructed and various other physical facilities such as availability of clean drinking water, toilet facilities, well- ventilated classrooms and labs were taken care of. Two additional posts were created which included an Estate Manager who would look after the building and estate of the school and a Salary Manager who would assist in the administrative work such as making salary bills and keeping official records of the teachers and other staff. The next year was marked for a software

system update. We shall talk about this important changes and how the academic environment of the schools was taken care of.

The treatment could not be initiated unless the correct diagnosis of the ailment was done. Hence, the first step was to find out the root cause and the extent of the damage. A baseline assessment test was conducted in all the 1000-plus government schools to check the reading ability and the basic mathematical ability of the students of Classes VI and VII. The results were an eye-opener. More than 50% of the students could not even read their prescribed textbooks and lacked basic mathematical literacy. In the first year of interventions, It was decided to conduct the reading classes and imparting basic mathematical literacy for such students and to stop transacting the subject content. If a child is not even able to read the textbook, how is he expected to enjoy the learning process and thus bring results? After, a few months of rigorous engagement with these children, the results were positive.

The next step was to enable them to construct their subject knowledge with the aid of Textbooks and teachers as their facilitators.

The need of the hour was to develop a resource which was simplified for the new readers. It was realised that the textbooks already in use were not appropriate in style and language as the end-users had recently learnt how to read. In order to encourage the new readers to take up subject books which were simplified in language and the content supported by visuals and diagrams, it was decided to develop a simplified resource and support material for them. These books were named *Pragati* meaning progress. The first series of books in English, Hindi and Maths was developed by the \*\*Department with a closed group of experts. The book garnered mixed responses from the teachers. The major criticism was that they lacked context and teachers thought that they could develop a better resource as they knew the learning gaps precisely and better than someone else not dealing



with the students.

The feedback was taken well by the Department and it was decided that another series would be developed by the teachers themselves. Here, the efforts of the Department are praiseworthy as it took note of the feedback of the stakeholders working at the ground level and decided to take up this massive task of engaging thousands of teachers.

This was the time to collaborate with all the teachers and co- create a system where the new readers could be facilitated to achieve grade -appropriate learning outcomes. During the summer vacations of 2016-17, a mass level of workshop for all the teachers was conducted. This workshop was held subject - wise, where all the same -subject teachers were made to sit in groups and design strategies. A common feedback from the teachers was that the Textbooks provided by NCERT and Delhi Bureau of Textbooks needed to be re-contextualised for the students. The teachers felt that the situations used to develop the content, the language of the book and the questions following the text needed to be re-phrased and re-written in a simple and lucid manner with the very own context of Delhi. The teachers unanimously felt that the government schools mostly cater to the socio-economically disadvantaged section of society, where the children do not have the greatly needed learning - conducive environment in their homes. It was decided to give the children a support book which could cater to their specific learning gaps and needs. Also, such contextualised material would assist the teachers in developing the context in the class with less time and effort. The reason for this was that the examples and situations which were already in the support material would facilitate the teachers in transacting the subject content.

Thousands of teachers sat together and created the content, the worksheets and presentations which would eventually be edited and put together as a support material. It was probably the first time that the teachers were not given a book prepared by an outsider who had no knowledge of the socio-cultural fabric and the learning profile of the students. In fact, the teachers prepared their own content which was based on the constructive pedagogy instead of following conventional trajectories.

As a result, these contextualised books have given a huge impetus to classroom discourse, as the

teachers actively engaged within their subject groups and brainstormed each and every topic of their subject. This process was beneficial in two ways. Firstly, it gave a resource material to the students in accordance with their learning needs. Secondly, it helped the teachers' professional competence and pedagogical disposition as they interacted within their subject groups, which led to discussions and debates on how to best transact a topic.

The books were an instant success. As the teachers were engaged in the process they owned the books as much as the Department did. The teachers felt exhilarated at seeing their work published in the form of a book. This feeling of belonging and ownership gave a huge impetus to their use in classroom discourse. Also, as the content was developed by their teachers, the material was well -suited to the students. The students learnt the concepts at their own pace and according to their needs. The results showed up in the annual assessment. The students who had previously been ignored and labelled as weak were now reading their textbooks and explaining the concepts in their own words. In addition to making the content simpler, the syllabus was also reduced for this group. It was realised that the quantity of concepts for this newly- literate group had to be reduced for them to take up learning gradually in order to make up for the previous years of learning loss. As per the current statistics only a low percentage of children have reading difficulties. This group consists of special children, children with learning disabilities and those who are long absentees.

Though a lot has been done to improve classroom instruction and a change in teaching learning discourse from didactic to constructive, a lot more still needs to be done to improve the quality of learning in government schools. Issues such as a high pupil -teacher ratio, engagement of teachers in administrative work of the school such as fee collection, maintaining administrative records, distributing and inspecting midday meals to name a few, eat up the precious teaching time of the teachers and drain their physical and mental energies. In addition is the fact that the school heads work largely as administrative officers and lack the much needed academic leadership which projects the schools as mini -administrative units instead of growing as a learning organisation.

With the current government working tirelessly



to improve the quality of education in the public sector, it has engaged various non-governmental bodies having rich experience in education as advisories. One such organisation is CREATNET, which works with principals and teachers to develop

school leadership. We hope that continuous effort and a sincere will to improve the logistics as well as the quality of education will see every government school as a learning organisation.

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**Anju**, a Post Graduate Teacher at a Delhi Government Schools under Directorate of Education, Delhi, has 15 years' teaching experience and has been a Mentor Teacher providing support to other teachers. She has had global exposure to leadership and maths programmes. She may be contacted at [anjughavri@gmail.com](mailto:anjughavri@gmail.com)