



Understanding Resilience of Socially Disadvantage Group: Inclusions in the Formal School System

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ABSTRACT

The study has been undertaken in light of critical function of education to empower all learners to claim their right to a life with dignity. Right to Education Act provides an opportunity for quality education in private schools to children from economically weaker section. The study explores challenges faced by students and their parents who have been admitted in this category and attempts to record their voices and life experiences. An attempt has been made to understand what factors made them resilient. Research has pointed and has been reiterated in the study that there is a positive correlation between education and resilience. Both students and parents feel that education is a tool for their social mobility that will help them grow despite their socio-economic disadvantages. They feel public (state run) schools are incapable of helping them fulfill their dreams. Despite prejudices faced this group wants to make the most of this opportunity. The factors that nurture resilience need to be acknowledged and systematically incorporated in the regular practices of the schools. The study suggests that there is an urgent need to sensitize school curriculum, teachers, and all students to the issues of inclusion in an integrated manner.

Keywords: Social disadvantage, RTE, School, Resilience

INTRODUCTION

Disturbing conditions of children have been a cause of concern for us as a nation. Girls are among the most vulnerable members of any community and suffer disproportionately from poverty and inequality. They have to face compounded effects of caste, patriarchal structures, biased attitudes of parents and teachers towards health and education. Although it is appropriate to recognize the desperate social and economic conditions that effect young girls, it is also critical to study how some succeed despite the overwhelming odds against them. According to developmentalists, these people exhibit resilience.

Over the last twenty years, resilience has been investigated by social workers, psychologists, sociologists and educators (Good & Dweck, 2006, Masten, 2001, Rutter, 1998, Ungar, 2004; Werner & Smith, 2001). Resilience has been defined as a process or phenomenon reflecting positive child adjustment despite conditions of risk and adversity (Luthar, 2003). Adversities can include anything that is expected to impede or affect functioning and development of a child. For example, living in poverty has continually been shown to be a risk factor for negative developmental outcomes, both physically and psychologically. Often, the term

resilience is used to describe a personal attribute or trait that leads a child-at-risk to succeed. However, research over the last two decades indicates that resilience results from factors both internal and external to the child, such as the family and the environment (including culture and community) (Luthar, 2003). Hence, a contextual understanding of resilience is needed (Kaur, Menon and Konantambigi, 2001).

Emerging understanding

The construct of resilience has captured the imagination of researchers across various disciplines over the last five decades (Ungar, 2008a). Despite a growing body of research in the area of resilience, there is little consensus among researchers about the definition and meaning of this concept. Resilience has been used to describe eight kinds of phenomena across different disciplines. These eight phenomena can be divided into two clusters based on the disciplinary origin. The first cluster mainly involves definitions of resilience derived from the discipline of psychology and the second cluster of definitions is rooted in the discipline of sociology.

Cultural perspectives play a key role in understanding resilience (Ungar, 2008). Understanding which aspects of physical and social ecologies influence resilience depends upon an appreciation for how these aspects are valued by a particular culture. There is a need to be open to the possibility of culture being resisted or rejected and an alternate culture being adopted as a pathway to successful adaptation (Shaikh & Kauppi, 2010).

The concept of resilience transcends the boundaries of academic disciplines and represents an area for interdisciplinary inquiry. It is long-term and developmental. Resilience involves children displaying adaptive or competent functioning despite exposure to high levels of risk and adversity (Vanderbilt-Adriance, & Shaw, 2008). It is not static (Luthar, 2006). There appears to be no single path to resilience. It may be impacted by changing risk and protective factors at different ages and developmental stages. Identifying developmentally appropriate, adaptive functioning is important in defining resilience (Masten & Obradovic, 2006). Moreover, Resilience may be “domain-specific”, with a child showing competent functioning in one area of their life e.g., academic achievement but deficits in another e.g., emotional functioning (Luthar, 2006).

The research literature is now attempting to understand the importance of studying resilience in a context. It aims to specifically understand the positive adaptations that are unique to risk context, understand the similarities and differences of protective factors in different communities and cultures, and finally to have a more thorough understanding of resilience by moving beyond Western research towards an enhanced local perspective. Despite the confusion generated by multiple definitions, the underlying idea of overcoming odds and rebounding from the disturbances seems to have a universal appeal and cultural resonance.

Research has consistently found that education is a very significant factor related to resilience (Masten & Powell, 2003). It is also giving children living in poverty, who traditionally face deprivation and gender discrimination (preferential treatment of male children at the cost of the female child) (Misra & Tripathi, 2004), a sense of hope for their future. The implementation of Right to Education promises to provide free and compulsory education to all the children of the age of 6-14 years, with a special focus on educational needs of children in difficult circumstances. Doors of opportunity should be open to all. The system has to be ready to understand and address the needs of the marginalized sections. Education should become a matter of right for the marginalized children. Thus, there is an organic-mutual link between this resilience and education.

Learning and empowerment do not happen just by enrolling children to schools. Formal education needs to go beyond the transaction of text books and therefore reproduction of the social order- towards a more inclusive sensitive environment. Different aspects of

development are addressed rather than only the 3 R's. Learning can take place in a non-threatening and accepting environment.

The point of analysis and discussion have always been the educational setup, stakeholders, but we seldom hear the voices of the children, parents and teachers who are a part of this educational process and majorly for whom this whole system is constructed. What the system has missed till now is to look at what is the social-economic context of children, teachers and parents. So the question that arises is whether our educational system understands the needs of the different sections of society.

The need arises to look at children in the context of the lives lead by them. There is a section of children who do not have stability in terms of family support home infrastructure, resources and access to education. There might be a difference between the time and responsibility of performing the social roles, which are not in accordance with their age, in comparison to the other sections of the society where children have all these facilities.

One has heard numerous words like 'disadvantaged', 'deprived', 'weaker section' etc, but there is a need to understand what these words mean and whom they refer to. When one say a 'weak child', then is disadvantaged child image associated with a 'weak' child and does a 'weak' child necessarily belong to a particular section of society? The point of reference for such demarcations and labeling within the educational system have often been the distribution of personal and social resources.

There are various researches and voluntary organizations that refer to deprived, vulnerable children, children in difficult situations, children at risk and such other categories as being urban disadvantaged children. The focus is on the categories of disadvantaged children in urban areas, who are being addressed through various programmes at operational levels (Chakrabarty, 2002).

The disparities can also be seen in the language spoken by people in various regions of India and sometimes their 'backwardness' or 'advancement' is correlated to the language spoken by a community. "It is difficult to explain why Hindi speaking regions are generally more backward than non-Hindi speaking regions, so where do we locate the reason for backwardness- in religious beliefs, practices, styles of life, geographical location or education?" (cited in Mukhopadhyay, R, 2008)

Policies and Programmes

The Preamble of our Constitution begins with, 'We the people of India resolve to constitute India into a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic and to secure to all its citizen justice, liberty, equality and fraternity.'

The Constitution of India lays down that the state shall not deny to any person equality before the law (Article 14) and not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15). No citizen shall, on the above grounds, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to employment (Article 16). Article 29 states that any section of the citizens having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the rights and interests of minorities. The Government of India had a constitutional obligation (Article 45) to make education compulsory for all children in age-group of 6-14 years, with a period of 10 years from 1951.

The Kothari Commission (1964-66) had as its objectives to address the issue of 'quality' in education & recommend an integrated approach to educational development which would lead to a comprehensive education policy for India. "One of the important social objectives of education is to equalize opportunity, enabling the backward or underprivileged classes and individuals to use education as a lever for the improvement of their conditions. Every society that values social justice and is anxious to improve the lot of common man and cultivate all

available talent must ensure progressive equality of opportunity to all sections of the population. This is the only guarantee for the building up of an egalitarian and human society in which the exploitation of the weak will be minimized” (Kothari commission).

The NPE, 1986 worked towards providing a national system of education for equality. The main objectives of the National Policy of Education of 1986 and Programme of Action of 1992 is that education must play a positive role in empowering women, disadvantaged and the minorities. It also aims to make education system such that it will cater to the needs of each individual, thus making education child-centered. For this, ‘Navodaya Vidyalayas’ have been introduced, where children who have ‘special talent’ are given an opportunity to enhance their talent and aptitude.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan program works toward providing useful and relevant education for qualitative and relevant education for every child in 6-14 age group. This program considers decentralization as a strategy for planning and management. It also offers provisions like remedial classes, learning enhancement program, and teacher training etc., to provide quality education.

The Constitutional (86th Amendment) Bill, notified on 13 December 2002 provides for free and compulsory education as a Fundamental Right, for all children in the age group 6-14 years. National Curriculum Framework (2005) states “inclusive education is about embracing all. All children especially the differently abled children from the marginalized sections and the children in different circumstances get the maximum benefit of education.”. It also states that formal approach, i.e., ‘equality of treatment’ in terms of equal access or equal representation is inadequate. ‘Equality of outcome’ needs to be adopted where diversity, difference and disadvantage are taken into account. “A critical function of education for equality is to enable all learners to claim their rights as well as to contribute to society and polity. We need to recognize that rights and choices in themselves cannot be exercised until central human capabilities are fulfilled. Thus, in order to make it possible for marginalized learners to claim their rights as well as play an active role in shaping collective life, education must empower them to overcome the disadvantages of unequal socialization and enable them to develop their capabilities of becoming autonomous and equal citizens” (NCF, 2005)

The Right to Education Act, 2009 under article 21 A ensures that every child in the age span of 6-14 years has the obligatory right to receive free and compulsory education irrespective of caste, religion, socio-economic status etc. This is one of the most important policies in the field of education and works on providing for one of the most essential components required to live a life of dignity i.e. education.

The Supreme Court gave judgment, which was followed by the Delhi Government’s notification for reservation of seats and freeships to the children of the economically disadvantaged classes by recognized, private, un-aided schools in Delhi. Schools had obtained land at concessional rates from the Delhi government on the condition that 25 per cent of their intake would be in the form of freeships for children of poor parents. In January 2004, the Delhi High Court, ordered private, unaided schools to abide by the conditions in their land lease agreements. With this verdict, even schools whose land lease agreements do not have this clause now have to reserve 25 per cent seats for the ‘weaker sections’ of society in their schools. However, in 2011 The Delhi High Court asked the Delhi Government not to force the private schools established on their own land to provide freeship to the poor students in the Capital. The private schools allotted land at a concessional rate would have to provide 20-30 percent freeship to the poor students according to the lease agreement. (retrieved from <http://www.oneindia.com/2006/10/11/hc-asks-govt-not-to-force-schools-on-their-own-land-to-give-freeship-1160577854.html> on 19 January 2015)

Thus, at the policy level lot of initiatives have been taken towards the constitutional commitment to equity. There are not many researchers have been conducted in the area where the perceptions of the people belonging to this group have been taken into account. The present study has focused on this aspect and hence has taken perceptions and notions of these people on various educational experiences

Objectives

Keeping the above focus in mind, the **objectives** formulated for the study are:

- To study voices of students admitted under the EWS category
- To find out parents' perceptions about their child's school life experiences as well as their own in the privately managed schools

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants of the present study were children and parents. The search of the participants began by locating the schools that follow admissions under EWS. Even though the government policy necessitates that all private schools should have children from the EWS - there were only a few schools that had children under the category. It has been found that many children admitted under this category do not belong to the EWS category. Hence, the schools, children and parents were selected on the basis of purposive sampling technique. The main study comprised of 14 children and 14 parents from the selected sample of schools of Delhi.

Rationale for selection of participants

The selected participants were from the various school grades and settings to get in depth and varied responses. The rationale for selecting the participants is:

- Children were selected from VI –XI grades on the assumption that may have already settled in their school and classroom, have established relationships with peers. Children are more vocal about how they feel and do not generally conform to the prevailing notions. Interacting with different age groups gave insights about their experiences
- The selected school claims to have admitted children under the Supreme Court notification of 25% reservation of seats of children from the economically weaker sections. This setting would give us diverse viewpoints
- Parents were also included in the study so as to get their experiences, as it has been felt that voices of parents are seldom heard

Challenges faced during research

Locating the participants for the study turned out to be a very difficult task. Both school and participants had many apprehensions which lead to many difficulties in contacting the participants. The first hurdle we faced was to locate those private schools (popularly known as public schools) which followed the 25 per cent reservation norm. Locating such a school was our big problem. Firstly, there are not many private schools that had admitted children under this norm. Secondly, even if the schools were admitting children in the 25% quota, they have not started the process from 2004. The schools have started admitting children in EWS quota only after the Right to Education Act (RTE). RTE came into effect in 2010. This aspect is very important for us as the design of the study states that participants (children) for the study should be in classes VI-XI.

It was when the schools were identified, came the second hurdle. Schools showed reluctance in granting permission to do research. At first to seek permission in the schools, we had to visit each school at least two-three times, in order to meet the various people in the

administrative hierarchy. It took more time in seeking permission and starting the research than the whole duration spent in a school!

The schools showed reluctance in allowing us to enter, observe and conduct interviews with various stakeholders. Even if they allowed initially, after listening to what is the underlying theme of the study, school administration used to refuse. It thus indicated that understanding the school system and conditions provided by the school to children admitted under RTE was not easy. The schools felt vulnerable in allowing outsiders to observe and report. Even when a school allowed us to observe, they used to read what we have recorded.

The school selected gave permission finally. But the schools did not allow us to audio record interviews and focused group discussions. We even contacted parents and children who were admitted to various schools in Delhi who are admitted under the 25percent reservation in schools. The family occupation and income indicated that they do not belong to the particular income group as specified in the norms. It was interesting to find that the cases admitted seemed to be not genuine.

Thus, the field reality and the struggles of the field made us realize that it is very difficult to gain access to the lives of the participants than we thought it will be. In order to locate the schools the research team has travelled almost in all five parts of the Delhi.

Tools used

In depth interviews were conducted with the children and parents separately. Interview was used in the study for collecting data and insights were gained through one to one interaction with all. A semi structured interview schedule was constructed regarding various situations and focused on:

- Transaction of curriculum
- Teacher student interaction
- Notions about Economically Weaker Section
- Experiences of being in school

Procedure

The schools were identified with all the procedural formalities. The researcher visited each school as and when they called. Rapport formation with the participants was of paramount importance, because unless the participant felt comfortable and relaxed, they might not provide information. Informal conversations were conducted with children before conducting actual interviews.

Data analysis

The data was collected, tabulated, coded and subjected to content analysis. All the dimensions were separately taken and discussed in details. Verbatim statements of the respondents have been included wherever necessary since they add to the lucidity of data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results are discussed in two heads: parents' and students' voices.

A. Parents' Voices

Information and admission procedure

Majority of the parents have reported that their children have been admitted to school from 3-5 years. This indicated that schools were not admitting children from 2004 and started taking children after implementation of RTE Act. All the parents got to know about the admission in EWS category either from spouse, neighbors, place of work (Eg. School), relatives or place of their stay/locality. None reported any outreach from the government or schools. Most of them were unaware of the existence of policy or act. It also seemed that when they got to know about the children from EWS being admitted to public schools, they didn't know the process or what children get there.

When asked about the admission procedure followed by schools for admitting children under EWS category in schools, parents reported of varied measures adopted by schools such as

lucky draw (draw of lots), by presenting to school authorities the required documents and test conducted by school. Parents said that they filled form of various schools as they were not sure in which school their children will get admission. This was reiterated by the experiences shared by their neighbors and relatives. The documents required by schools were related to income, residence, identity etc.

Parents mentioned that though they don't have to pay anything at the time of admission, still some of them gave some initial amount. This amount was given in the name of some fund or books, dress, shoes etc. one of the parent said, "fees nahin dete bas shuru mei lagta hai books, dress vagerah ke liye. Toh iske admission ke time par school valo ne liye the (do not give fees, only initially amount is given for dress etc. it was taken by school at the time of admission)." The range varied from 4000/- to 8000/- rupees.

Expenditures at school

Regarding expenses parents felt that they do not get enough support either from school or government. Almost all of them reported that they only get fee concession in school. Though they acknowledged that this is a large chunk of the total expenditure and this does make a difference in their lives. But it was also reported that fees is only one aspect of the total expenditure that is incurred while the child is going to a private school. The other expenses listed by them are for books, uniform, travel charge (conveyance charge from home to school and back), for some school fund, miscellaneous expenses like for making identity-card, school magazine, participating in school activities, picnics organized by school etc.

Parents also stated that other than direct expenses related to school; there is every day expenditures that is required to support the child going to school. These include spending on materials for various homework and school activities, expenditure on cyber café for using internet and taking printouts, dresses for any event/ dances and other day to day expenses. They said that sometimes the expenditure goes up to 10000/- annually. The monthly expenditure is reported to be between 100/- to 500/- rupees. Parents said that these expenses require changes in their home budget.

Almost all of them mentioned that if their child gets good quality education in private schools they are ready to meet these expenses. Meeting these expenses require them to make changes in budget or looking for other employment opportunities. They also mentioned that in the previous school of children, they used to get mid day meal and money for school uniform, books. Yet they felt that even with all the above, they are satisfied that at least their child is going to a good school and will get good exposure in life. One of the parent mentioned, "School se to koi help nahin milti bus yahi hai ki fees maaf hai nahin toh humari hesiyat itni nahin hai ki hum apne bacche ko private mei padha sake (we do not get any help from school, just that fees is waived off, otherwise our capacity is not that much that we can send our children to private schools)." Most of them are living a life where they have limited access to resources and money and linked the notion of inequality to that of money as well as the status one gets from it.

Experience of being in the school

Parents acknowledged that their children are getting from school -what they did not even think of getting for them. Getting admission to public schools was a big achievement for them. They felt that their children getting good education is their main focus. One of the parent said, "dekho hum to low standard se chal rahe hai vaha par to bohot high- fi hai, uske hisab se to kafi kam hai, par ye hai ki studies mei sahi chal raha hai, teachers ki kafi help hai (see we are going by low standard, there standard is hi-fi, it is very less, just that studies are going good, teachers help a lot)."

Upon getting this opportunity, all the parents felt that this opportunity has helped them. Most of them felt that it has. They mentioned that their child is going to a big school, getting good education is what they are contended with. One of the parent mentioned, "Itna bada school hai. Meri beti wahan jayegi. Kuch bada banegi. Warna sarkaari school me aap jaante hi ho kya padate hain (so big school, my daughter will go there. She will become big in position. Otherwise in government school, you know what they study)." Another parent said, "Aur kya chahiye. Bade school mein achche logon ke saath padhne ko mil raha hai. Humare yahan se sirf mere hi bachche naseeb wale hain (what else we need, in big school studying with good people. In my area only my children are lucky)."

On being asked about the child's experience at school with teachers parents had varied responses. Parents said that their children have good and cordial relationships in their classrooms with all the students. They told their children had reported that teachers were supportive and guided them aptly. They said that the teachers took care of their children. Teachers were fair and gave equal opportunities to everyone. They all mentioned of there being no adjustment problems in school that their children experienced. Teachers generally gave equal opportunities to everyone.

But on further questioning and long interaction, parents did mention about some events in the class related to peers and teachers that showed existence of adjustment problems. One of the parents mentioned, "Drawing teacher aisi hi hai. kabhi pencil box ya colour wagarah bhul jayen toh kisi se lene nahin deti (drawing teacher is like that, if [child] forgets pencil box or colour she does not let o take from anyone)." It is evident from the responses that sometimes teachers did not handle issues reported by the children. Though they mentioned that teachers made them part of the class but still there was a need expressed to understand the differences in the familial and the social context and also to be more sensitive.

Another parent mentioned, "Ek baar mere se bola tha ke koi ladka isko bola tha ke hut! Hut! tere papa toh sabzi bechte hain. Isi bat par iska ladai hua tha. Maine kaha tha ke mai ja ke shikayat karu. Mere ko yehi mana kar dia tha. Ye Sochta hai ke jae meri mummy toh kahi fir aage bat badh jae. Islie nahi bolta (one time he said to me, that some boy said go away, go away, your father sells vegetables. On this statement he had a fight. I said let me go and complaint, but he refused that. He thinks that if mother will go then there will be repercussions)." This also showed that sometimes children did not tell happenings of school to parents for the fear of their parents arguing with their teachers.

Otherwise parents reported that teachers were warm and made them part of the class. Parents also mentioned that teachers help and give extra classes during exam time and also on Saturdays. Teachers were aware of the children's home situations. Most of them reported that teachers are approachable and they have number of teachers and school. Almost all of them go to the Parent Teacher Meetings (PTM).

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Parents said that children might be from different background but basically everyone has the potential to succeed in life. On being asked, that, is there any effect of family background on children and school, children had varied views. Even though everyone agreed that the family background has effects on the schooling, but these differences could be minimized at the school.

Ideal school and yours

An ideal school for Parents:

- School teachers take out hidden talents of students

- Students are disciplined, obey teachers
- All facilities are there
- Students give ideas
- There is right to freedom, freedom to express, free to choose the way they want to do things
- Students are able to ask questions
- Students are supervised, given full opportunities, no pressure by school on children
- Co-curricular activities are given importance, trips are organized to various places outside and inside Delhi
- Discipline is there, giving direction, to live. The aim of living should be control of the mind and body

Parents had various expectations from the school. On being asked, they all mentioned various aspects in school that need improvement. Parents felt that school is unable to meet their expectations. Parents said that the school should be more sensitive to the needs of the children from different background, especially from lower socio economic strata. Like one of the parent said that school should provide medical assistance to children especially to girls. One parent mentioned, “Kabi periods wagarah aa jaye toh school ki taraf se koi help nahi h. jaise abi simran ke periods hue to saare kapde gande karke liye... school ki taraf se kuch nahin. ek pad k bhi paanch (5) rupaye maang liye (if she menstruates, there is no help from school. Like Simran had periods, her clothes got soiled, but there was no pad given. For one pad, school asked for 5/- rupees).” Parents wanted improvement in play ground; financial help from school in addition to fee concession or school provide books and dress. They expressed the need for extra classes or extra time for their children from teachers so that they get better understanding and can grasp concepts better. They said that teachers ask their children to stay after school for extra classes which is tough for them. One of the parent said, “humari choti beti ke liye kaha ki jo weaker section vale bacche hai unhe hum dopahar mei padhayenge, 2:30- 5 bje tak. Humne jab baat ki to bole ki humare school ka to yahi rule hai... Par fir humne nhi karaya kyunki dopahar main toh chodh aate iske papa par shaam ko lene kaun jata... Isliye humne nahin karaya (for our younger daughter they said that those who are in weake secton will have extra classes in afternoon 2.30 pm-5 pm. When we talked to them, they said this is the rule here. Then we did not get it done, as we would have been able to drop them in afternoon, but we are not available to pick them in evening. That is why we did not go for extra classes).”

B. Students' Voices

Information and admission procedure

The students interviewed were introduced (by the school) as students admitted in the EWS category, aged between 12-17 years, however majority of the respondents have been part of the school from 4-8 year. Most of the respondents knew about the EWS scheme and that it exempts them from school fees. One respondent however said she got to know of the fees exemption only from the researchers. Another respondent said that they got to know about 25% reservation from newspapers/media. Other respondents had heard about the scheme through relatives, personal contacts or place of work (working in schools). None reported knowing it through Government sources or in by the school.

Most of students got admission through lucky draw; one mentioned that she had to take a written test. Respondents had to pay a certain amount at the time of admission but nothing subsequently.

Experiences at school

All the respondents in the sample enjoy going to these schools. Various reasons cited by them include Dream of good quality of education, presence of friends, good studies, sports, doing practical in the labs, good infrastructure, library, good teachers of subjects they like, activities such as annual day, picnics, SUPW etc., sports, lot of activities, presence of elder sibling, a dream to become an engineer, doctor brought them into a privately managed school.

They see it as a “golden opportunity”.

On being asked to compare their earlier school with the current one, they like their current one because the school offers more activities and teachers do not leave mid period while teaching, they clarify doubts, care for the students and are polite.

They feel Government schools are incapable of preparing students for these competitive times; students use foul language and can spoil other students.

When asked to share their overall experience in the present school, one respondent shared that he was bullied by few students and teacher did nothing towards that. Most respondents like to participate in the competitions-but they go to ones within the school only as they do not have to pay for these. They had to pay for dress Rs 300/- . For out of school activities teachers ask for volunteers but then choose themselves. The school takes them to both city picnics, out of city trips and also international ones. Most of the respondents do not go for these due to the expense involved. It was reported by one student that he went once as other students paid for him. However, he felt embarrassed while going with other children who had paid for him.

When asked what they dislike about the school, the teachers give a lot of home work. There is too much pressure on studies and that becomes boring. Another respondent said the school could have more computers in school so that everybody gets a chance to use them.

One respondent shared that she is rather guarded with other people around her. She does not retaliate even when people call her “bevakuf” (stupid) even though she does not like it. She is scared that they may get angry or feel bad. In that case she will have to pacify her that may take long. But after some time mood gets fine. So, even though they do not mention discrimination there is ample evidence of these student making compromises and feeling excluded.

When asked if teachers behave with all students in the same manner, most of the respondents said that they do get similar treatment. Seats are changed when students talk or misbehave or do not complete their work. Students feel that teachers behave well with them and teachers get angry only on anyone who does not complete their work. Monitors are chosen by teachers on the criteria that child should be good at studies, behave well, and stay attentive in class. One respondent said that every student gets a chance in every 2 weeks. But they also reported that teachers only choose monitors for chalk n duster, at times this goes roll number wise. Teachers choose students who can work without forgetting and smartly. Thus, the school is taking some measures towards equality in class.

Respondents feel that even though some teachers insist that they use English in class, however they use any language. In case the students do not understand something they ask either the teacher or the tutor. Extra classes are held if many students have not understood -in zero periods and afterschool. Students can address their doubts in zero periods. Remedial classes are held for math, science and English.

One respondent feels that students from rich households do not talk properly and often misbehave with students from poor households. Often poor children cannot concentrate on studies. They cannot grow in life. Another respondent shared that once a girl got an expensive watch and teased others, she felt because she did not have it. A couple of days later, the teacher saw it and asked all students not to bring expensive items to class.

Initially most of the respondents felt lonely and used to cry for 3-4 months, however after that they got some friends. Initially there were problems in understanding class work –extra classes have helped subsequently. Some have got poor result as well. Some children who fight a lot with others get isolated; other students do not like to sit with them.

Ideal school

Most of the respondents said that ideal school would be a place where:

- There are no fights, there are a lot of friends, should be co-educational,
- Teachers teach each one according to their IQ so that students can answer and learn better,
- Teachers give equal opportunities to all, understand needs of students, One of the student said that she enjoyed sense of humor of the English teacher who cracks a lot of jokes
- Children study together with each other..
- Other students should be taught to be helpful towards fellow classmates.

Expectations from the school include that

Teachers should pay more attention to the weak students Ensure that all children are learning and others are not able to grasp and thus get left behind. When teacher teach, if some students have not understood, they feel that they cannot revisit the topic again as time gets over and the teacher moves to next topic in next period. The students who get left out feel very bad and feel teachers should not do that. It was felt that School should offer extra support for computers and English.

Daily routine

Daily routine of children comprise of getting ready and going to school, coming back home resting, playing, doing home work (if any), watching TV, having dinner and going to bed. In T.V. the respondents like to watch discovery, cartoon network, playing cricket or other sports, with other friends. One student goes for tuition and then teaches siblings.

One respondent said that she goes to school and rests till 4 pm, then fills water, wash dishes, teach tuitions with mother, make dinner, have a bath and then goes for a walk in the street.

Projects given are done with the help of tutors, mother, siblings. For computer information, printouts they go to cybercafés or seek help from friends. Few respondents feel that they find it difficult to access internet, but do not share the problem with the teacher as they feel she will not understand as others do finish their work.

Are all children same?

When asked if all children are same, the respondents felt that the discrimination is based on their abilities/intelligence-those who study from the beginning and are able to understand quickly. Language used also sets people apart. Some are good at sports while others are not. Some are disciplined while others are rowdy.

Good children are seen as those who are attentive in class, respect teachers, parents, use good language, are disciplined, do not misbehave or fight ,follow rules, keep the school clean, those who help others –share missed out work, homework, who you ask for doubts when you don't want to go the teacher.

Bad children are seen as those who do not study, loiter around randomly, fight with others, use abusive language, are mischievous and do not listen to their parents. One respondent feels that this scheme of admission under EWS category has not helped her as there is a lot of pressure, two have not responded to the question.

Others feel that fees exemption is a relief -as they could not have paid up the school fees otherwise. The school has good teachers, and regular studies are conducted, unlike Government schools. In Government schools teachers are irregular, they do not teach enough

and then students are also not interested in studies. They are just promoted even though they learnt nothing. They feel they are better prepared for higher level. Variety of activities conducted by the school helps them in their development. This school has helped one respondent to become “sharif” (good natured). Children studying in Government schools do not have any knowledge about anything. Those who drop out end up doing stitching or parlor courses-some things that illiterate people do.

CONCLUSION

The responses of the children and parents emphasized on the importance of education and its role in their lives. It emerged that they have a deep understanding and hope for the same. The need to have equal opportunities for every child is desired by all students and this has emerged as a central theme along with others from the voices of children. “What is needed is a change in the picture of society that education offers to all children, and this would require proportionate representation of different groups in the curricular knowledge and symbols” (Kumar and Shukla, 1985). This would be more representative of the real society rather than an exclusive and controlled group. This would provide a real connection between the society and school and be developmentally more appropriate for students of both privileged and underprivileged sections.

The point of discussion have always been the educational setup, stakeholders, but we seldom hear the voices of the children, parents and teachers who are a part of this educational process and majorly for whom this whole system is constructed. What the system has missed till now is to look at what is the social-economic context of children, teachers and parents and its impact on the educational process. So the question that arises is whether our educational system understands the needs of children from different sections of society?

Students aspire to become doctor, engineer, astronaut, air hostess etc. one of them wants to build schools and hospitals for the poor. This can be attributed to their socialization with other socio- economic groups in the school. Quality education is uniformly seen as a tool for better opportunities in life, social mobility by parents and students. Education in English medium private schools is seen as a “golden opportunity”.

The Government schools seem to have failed on the wish list of parents and students. According to the respondents Government schools are seen as incapable of preparing students for competitive times they lack in infrastructure such as laboratories, library and opportunities like sports, competitions, activities etc. Teachers also do not bother about the language of the children. Having passed from such schools students end up with jobs like beautician, sewing etc. So this hope for better education drives them to look for other options for schooling.

Mere admission to such schools is insufficient, the schools have to play a mediating role. They have to play a proactive role in development of identity and self of the children. There should be a conscious effort to reduce this sense of isolation of these children in the schools.

This opportunity of admission into private schools under EWS category means a lot to parents and students.

Most of them got to know about this scheme under re from their friends, neighbor, place of work (e.g. school), relatives or television. None reported of any outreach from the government or schools. Most of them were unaware of any policy or act. Parents said that they filled form of various schools as they were not sure in which school their children will get admission.

Besides direct experiences everyday expenditure to support the child is quite high. Parents said that these expenses require changes in their home budget. Nevertheless they are willing to go an extra mile such as look for other jobs etc if their child gets good quality education.

An ideal school for the respondents is one where there are lot of friends and no fights, which has teachers who understand needs of children, teach according to their level of understanding, take care of weak students and nobody is left behind. The school should identify and nurture hidden talents of students, where students are disciplined and obey the teachers. There is freedom to express and choice of the way they want to do things. Attributes of favorite teachers include a caring attitude towards students, explain well, are good natured, do not scold, involve all students in work and give extra time and attention.

Parents feel that they are lucky to have got this opportunity where their children study with “acheche log” (good humans) in a “bade school” (big school). They are disappointed with government school and these private schools have high standard.

The biggest irony here is that the State has lost faith in its own system and feels that quality education can be received only in private schools.

It was evident from the responses that sometimes teachers did not handle issues reported by the children and can at times knowingly or unknowingly enhance uncertainty in these students. Though they mentioned that teachers made them part of the class but still there was a need expressed to understand the differences in the familial and the social context and to be more sensitive.

Pre-service and In-service teacher education programs should ready themselves to include these aspects in their education .These are emerging needs and cannot be left to chance or sweet/benevolent nature of the teacher.

The students from EWS in the sample choose not to interact or express themselves freely as they feel unsure of themselves and others, most of the times. They have been resilient despite having met with a lot challenges to reach this point .So now the onus should be on the school to nurture them and not see them as a burden.

We shouldn't see resilience as something we can teach. This approach will lead to short-term and often misdirected strategies. Resilience should be fostered throughout strengthening protective factors for them at critical moments of their lives, so that their potential to be resilient when faced with risk factors remains intact and nurtured further.

The need arises to look at children in the context of the lives lead by them. There is a section of children who do not has stability in terms of family support home infrastructure, resources and access to education. There might be difference between the time and responsibility of performing the social roles, which are not in accordance with their age, in comparison to the other sections of the society where children have all these facilities.

The focus of these programmes should be on development of a school and classroom climate of mutual trust, sensitivity, collaboration, cooperation, critical thinking, exchange of ideas leading to a positive development of self and identity. What is urgently required is a much more creative, innovative academic engagement in curricula, sensitivity, and teacher education and prepare the system to deal with emerging challenges rather than fitting people in its existing setup.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With sincere regards, we thank our mentor Prof. Namita Ranganathan, for her constant guidance, invaluable suggestions and constructive criticisms throughout the course of this study. Reproduction of our present work would have proved arduous without her thoughtful insights and supervision. We would also like to thank all the participants who enthusiastically participated in the study and made it meaningful. We would like to thank DU Innovation desk, University of Delhi for giving us this opportunity and enabling us to take up the research. We thank and acknowledge the contribution of our student team which actively participated in the research, namely Ikjot Kaur, Sonal Sharma, Yamini Yadav, Priyanka

Anand, Komal Solanki, Isha Khatri, Mansi Tayal, Diksha Kukreja, Bhawna Shukla and Maitri Rawal.

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