

## **Lessons learnt by studying some school models towards a replicable and scalable model of schools for the underprivileged sector of Indian society**

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Primarily, two kinds of models are being experimented for the underprivileged sector in India: Formal and Non-formal. Formal education system comprises of the conventional education syllabus and curriculum as prescribed by boards at Central, All-India and state levels. The non-formal education model comprises of designing modules of education keeping in mind the social and economic conditions of the incoming students. These education models are geared towards providing education in living sciences, health sciences, basic language learning, arithmetic and an *enabling* kind of education relevant to the socio-economic setting.

Whether it is the formal or non-formal method of education that is justified for the underprivileged sector is an issue of constant debate. The structure of formal education is motivated by the 1964 Education Policy, where it was decided to stress on science and math education which leads the students to become engineers, doctors and other professionals. Is such an education relevant for the underprivileged sector given that a handful of the Indian population becomes professionals? Is this education relevant to the needs of the underprivileged sector? However, if such education is not made available to the underprivileged sector, will we not exclude them from the opportunity to pursue professional careers or careers which have formal education as a 'requirement'? Will this not lead to further increasing (or sustaining) the differential in the society which already exists? This is an important question of debate and could be resolved only by an argument supported by philosophical ideas of education, the practical reality and statistical studies of outcomes of education.

This question shall need active attention when one thinks of the concept of a scalable and replicable model of schools 'useful' for the underprivileged. The study of some current education models show that they have adopted one of these two depending on their philosophy. Their description is now presented.

### **Parikrama Humanities Foundation**

Parikrama currently has 4 schools in Bangalore area. They have adopted the ICSE board of education (formal) and provide education from grade V till the person starts earning. Parikrama is in many ways like a private ICSE-syllabus based school. However, they have devised interesting and effective mechanisms to cater to the underprivileged student given that he/she gets little non-formal education at home and in a worst-case scenario may have faced trauma/indignation in the neighborhood he/she lives in. To address this, the teachers provide individual attention to the students by maintaining behavioral diary for each of them which includes their background, family details and learning difficulty. Additionally, the school also actively takes care of the mental health of the student by having in-house professional psychologists. Parikrama Schools also stress on other extra-curricular activities for overall development of the student. In a more holistic sense, Parikrama understands that education is not the end of all evils and works with other

NGOs on health-care, nutrition and family care in the slums near which their schools operate.

Parikrama primarily works on a donation model and their model of scale-up is to let existing schools re-use the best-practices they have designed and tested to cater to the needs of the underprivileged. They are currently working with the Bangalore Mahanagar Palike to improve BMP high schools.

In my understanding, Parikrama has done very good work in developing a methodology to carefully address the requirement of the underprivileged sector (by mental health setup, individual attention and non-formal education) with the aim of providing formal education. This methodology is worth replicating in other models. At the same time, Parikrama works on donation and the nature of their activities seems pretty expensive. In such a situation, it is difficult for them to scale up their operations and it remains a question whether their methodology of education will remain economically viable at a lower price point.

### **Gyan-shala**

Gyan-shala focuses on providing beginner-level non-formal education to the underprivileged sector. They run classes in 10 slums in Ahmedabad. Gyan-shala is focusing on providing *enabling* education, i.e. to make the student an ‘independent reader and writer in first 3 years in his/her local language’ and basic arithmetic and ‘analytical observation skills’. Gyan-shala has kept constant emphasis on running on low costs of operation, low cost for consumer (student/parent) and use of readily available human resource (grade 10-12 passouts). They see these necessary for ensuring scalability. They have developed modules for language learning and arithmetic, which are readily available on their website. They propose a few models of scale-up, i. Scale-up through market forces, ii. Adoption of their methodology by govt. schools and other NGOs, iii. Possible partnership with govt. schools, where Gyan-shala students go to govt. schools in Class IV.

Gyan-shala provides a nice model for running sustainably a basic institution of non-formal elementary education. How they train their teachers, design classes and deliver quality education<sup>1</sup> at a low price point shall be useful concepts for reuse. The question regarding the Gyan-shala apart from the conventional wisdom against non-formal education is what happens after the first three years of education? Is this education really *enabling*? A survey of Gyan-shala passouts and their socio-economic condition may shed some light on this.

### **Akanksha**

Akanksha provides non-formal education to 2600 students in 51 centres in Mumbai and Pune and another 2010 students in 10 other schools. Akanksha has worked out a

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<sup>1</sup> The author doesn't know of independent studies in this regard. They would be necessary before adoption of such a model.

Curriculum with 10 levels spread over the age of 5 years to 16 years to teach English, Maths and values. The last three modules concentrate on preparing the student for a job. They run other workshops and programs for dance, drama, sports, etc. They have developed extensive curriculum manuals and documentation of entire process of setting up a center. They are primarily donation-based, have 150 employees and a number of volunteers. Their scale-up can be facilitated by the fact that they provide their curriculum manuals and documentations for setting up a center for free.

Akanksha has done some excellent work in designing and testing 10 years of curriculum for non-formal education in math, English and other requirements of the student. They also claim to have documentation on how to setup schools. This material is of great reuse value in future schools. However they are donation-driven and it is not clear whether they will be financially viable if scaled up to multiple centres.

## **Summary**

In working towards a scalable, replicable and ‘useful’ model of education for the underprivileged sector, the question of whether to follow formal, non-formal education or a fusion of both approaches will be a fundamental question. In regard to the current school models, Parikrama has pioneered methodology to deliver formal education, while also taking care of the other necessary requirements of the students from the underprivileged sector. Similarly, Akanksha has pioneered the curriculum design and delivery for non-formal education spread over 10 years of student life. However, both these models are essentially donation-based, Parikrama’s execution seems to be expensive and it is debatable how well their methodologies can be implemented in a sustainable, consumer driven model at a low price point. On the other hand, Gyan-shala has kept the education ambitions limited by providing enabling elementary education, but worked on the scalability aspect well both with respect to the finance and human resource. In search for a new scalable and sustainable model providing useful education to underprivileged sectors, these models are good learning lessons and provide reusable parts. It is so believed that an ideal model will be a cross (a trade-off) between these different approaches settling at an amicable education curriculum like that of Parikrama or Akanksha and a sustainable price structure like that of Gyan Shala. The multi-faceted question of non-formal and formal education will need deeper thinking at multiple levels.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## **Links**

1. Parikrama (Shukla Bose - Bangalore) - [www.parikramafoundation.org](http://www.parikramafoundation.org)
2. Gyan Shala (Pankaj Jain - Ahmedabad) - [www.gyanshala.org](http://www.gyanshala.org)
3. Akanksha (Shaheen Mistri - Mumbai) - [www.akanksha.org](http://www.akanksha.org)

## **Additional Document**

Organization data: A table enlisting different aspects of these organizations