

Promoting Quality and Sustainable Schools

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Introduction

As we look toward fulfilling the ambitious UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, the plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity cannot be met without acknowledging the important connection between educational development and a sustainable learning environment. A sustainable school adopts a "whole-school" approach; one that extends beyond the curriculum and addresses the entire planning, operation and management of the school facility. School sustainability policies and practices can strengthen what is taught about sustainability in the classroom, improve the school's own carbon footprint and strengthen public relations with the surrounding community. A sustainable school prepares young people for a lifetime of sustainable living through its teaching and day-to-day practices. In conformity with the concept of sustainable school, Para 4.23 of the NEP lays stress on creating environmental awareness on water and resource conservation, sanitation and hygiene. As part of the Shikshak Parv programme, the webinar on "Promoting Quality and Sustainable Schools" was organized on 14 September 2021.

Session Highlights

Sh. Santosh Kumar Sarangi, Additional Secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy began the webinar by welcoming all the teachers, principals, students, academicians and parents viewing the live webcast. He invited Ms. Anamika Singh, IAS, DGSE of Uttar Pradesh and the chairperson of the webinar to give introductory remarks. She welcomed all the participants and speakers for the session in Shikshak Parv on the theme 'Promoting Quality and Sustainable Schools'. She mentioned that one of the critical challenges after reopening of the schools is to address the learning gaps in children. She explained the different elements of quality school by drawing an analogy with Maslow's pyramid for hierarchy of human needs. She discussed that at the base is an environment where children feel emotionally, physically and psychologically

secure and nurtured, where there is no discrimination, no violence and no fear. Then comes the basic infrastructure, textbooks, teaching learning material, print rich environment and other infrastructure which should not only be readily available but accessible to the end users. She highlighted that as we move higher on the pyramid, the role of teacher becomes crucial. The teacher should have good knowledge of the subject and skills of communication and transaction. In addition to this, she talked about, the need for decentralization and use of approaches that empower teachers and students, who are at the centre of learning process, enhancing the quality of learning. For supervision and monitoring she expressed that over-centralization of academic processes make people lose autonomy and in turn accountability over their actions.

Ms. Singh stated that experiential learning using indigenous materials, active and engaged participation of teachers and children and more freedom to teachers will be crucial to bring up quality schools. She added that learning multiple language and skills at the same time and learning across classrooms are also important elements of good and sustainable schools. She also highlighted the key role of parents and the community in developing well-rounded human beings. Ms. Singh concluded by saying that the key aspect of the quality school would be to provide enough space for teaching core values of humanity, polite behaviour, respect for constitution and other contemporary skills. After introducing the relevance of the topic for school education, Ms. Singh introduced the presenter Shri Rahul Pachori, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Education and invited him to make his presentation. Mr. Pachori is B. Tech. Electrical Engineering and currently looking after externally aided projects, upcoming National Assessment Centre PARAKH, teacher education, and the implementation of Samagra Shiksha in some States and UTs.

In his presentation, Mr. Pachori explained the concept of quality education and how we have progressed through in education. He asserted that the vision of quality and sustainable schools is an approach to strike a balance between society, economy and environment. He remarked that a sustainable school is guided by the principle of “*sarve bhavantu sukhinah...*” which means care for us, care for others and care for the planet. Such schools control wastage by sound management of all kinds of resources, including environment. Through its teaching and practices these schools influence the thinking as well as practices of its students. He stated that the NEP 2020 envisions schools becoming sustainable and providing quality education.

Mr. Pachori informed the viewers about the various recent initiatives under Samagra Shiksha, leading to improvement in the quality of education. He described the initiative of establishing around 15,000 exemplar schools which will have all the components of NEP, providing leadership to other schools in their region. The Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States Program (STARS) programme, which is a World Bank aided project, was also discussed by the presenter during the session. He concluded his presentation by reiterating that transforming schools into quality and sustainable schools needs to be a continuous quest embedded in the structure and practices of the schools. After the presentation, chairperson introduced the first speaker Mr. Yudhveer Tandon and invited him to make his presentation. Sh. Tandon is a recipient of the State Award as well as many other recognitions bestowed on him for his hard work and innovations. He is a teacher in the Government Primary School, Anoga (Distt. Chamba) of Himachal Pradesh.

Mr. Tandon made a lively presentation with the help of pictures and photographs. Through his presentation, he demonstrated various activities which can be easily included in the practices and time table of the school. These activities would not only arouse interest for learning, but will make children engaged learners. He presented small innovations like “honesty shop”, “children’s hygiene committee”, supplying personal hygiene kit, naming the schools spaces like playground, assembly, lab with the name of famous personalities and freedom fighters. He also showed other interesting interventions like ‘*Bal Samvidhan*’, ‘*Bal Sansad*’, ‘*Bal Bachat Bank*’, ‘Question box’ and ‘*Bal Samachar Patrika*’ etc. In his opinion, these activities are shaping the personality of the young primary school children in the right direction, for example, the feeling of being responsible, respecting democratic values, active participation in the classroom and school activities.

Mr. Tandon also shared other initiatives to improve school climate and attitude of children. He highlighted that involving the community is a simple, yet effective step which brings life to the school and makes them leaders of their region. Gardening, yoga education and celebrating different days (*Khel Diwas*, *Vigyan Diwas*, *Vishwa Jal Diwas*, *School Suraksha Diwas*, *Swatantrata Diwas*) in the school stimulate active thinking of children. He ended by saying that we must all, teachers and students, work towards becoming more open-minded.

The chairperson appreciated the presentation for the useful ideas to enhance experiential learning, involve community in school management and other innovations which were time and cost savvy. Use of technology during covid times to control the learning loss in children was a good step on the part of the school and teachers. She also lauded the activities shown in the presentation which would help in value inculcation. The chairperson introduced the second speaker Ms. Manju Balasubramanyam and invited her to make her presentation. Ms. Manju Balasubramanyam is serving as the Principal, Delhi Public School Bangalore North. She is a recipient of the National Award for Teachers (President of India) in 2018 and Fulbright Distinguished Award for Teachers in 2014.

Ms. Balasubramanyam started her presentation with the famous quote from Gandhiji: “the world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed.” She drew attention towards SDG4 related to ‘Ensuring Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promoting Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All’. She delineated that good quality and sustainable schools need to have all these components- inclusive, equitable, quality education and promotion for lifelong learning. With a rise in technology, it is important to ensure that ethics and values are sustained. Good listening and giving respect to other voices is important. She highlighted four major themes around which efforts can be directed to achieve the goal of transforming the schools to higher quality and sustainable. These themes or categories, as per her presentation, are- waste management, green projects, innovations & events and social action. She also tried to exemplify that the thread of sustainability needs to be woven in the activities of the school in such a way that it becomes a part of routine practices. Providing opportunities, encouraging children to participate and facilitate organisation of variety of activities should be a part of the intended curriculum.

Ms. Balasubramanyam highlighted the need for reuse, rebuilt, repair, recycle and so on for reducing the wastage which causes damage to the environment. All these were shown as activities which are organised in the school as a practice. She added that development of creativity and problem-solving skills is possible through such activities. This was well demonstrated through school album and photographs. She emphasized that involving the community is always good for everyone- students, teacher, school and the government. The strong message that shone through the presentation was that ‘inclusive environments are

sustainable and promote quality'. Ms. Singh complimented the presentation and highlighted that the important messages from the presentation could be nurturing the creative side of the students, collaborating with the community and peer learning through the exchange programmes. The chairperson introduced the last speaker Mr. Manit Jain, who is an alumnus of Delhi University and Harvard Graduate School of Education. He is the Co-founder and Director of Heritage group of six schools in Delhi NCR. Mr. Jain is championing the cause of experiential learning and launching it successfully in mainstream environment.

Mr. Jain started his presentation saying that in creating a vision it is essential to draw lessons from our history. He took the viewers through the first, second and third industrial revolutions, highlighting the markers during each revolution. He remarked that the fourth industrial revolution was the one, announced at The World Economic Forum five years ago. According to him, there are five megatrends that we will see in this revolution- Tech, Trans, Virtual, Internet of things and Artificial Intelligence and Sharing economy. He explained these five trends with familiar examples. He explained that research says machines will do all repetitive tasks, physical or cognitive and humans will develop social and creative intelligence. Social intelligence comprises empathy, perceptiveness, the ability to connect, relate, reconcile differences, the ability to influence, share and trustworthiness. Likewise, the components of creative intelligence are- original thinking, deep inquiry, interestedness, curiosity, ability to put disparate bits of information together to make a whole, creative problem solving, etc. In his opinion, being human would become both a social and an economic imperative and that we have arrived in the era of the survival of the humanist.

Through his presentation, Mr. Jain demonstrated that technological progress has no limits. He raised a significant question: "*are we educating to be more human or more machine*". He then discussed how to make teaching multidisciplinary. Projects should be given not only to develop creative skills but also impart substantial conceptual understanding and learning of Science, History, English and many more subjects together. He also described certain initiatives where schools and voluntary agencies joined, like '*raahgiri*' project in Gurgaon. He pointed out that the result of poor education is rampant unemployment and a huge skills gap between what is needed to be successful at work and what our education is preparing us for. In building a vision for the

future and to re-humanize education, we need to make a shift from outdated content and rote learning to developing social and creative intelligence. He concluded his presentation by saying that the power is in the hands of students and the key lies in making our learning more experience-based. This will lead to making of good quality sustainable schools. The chairperson acknowledged that the presentation was interesting and the challenges we have been facing as a civilization were well explained.

Question and Answer Session

The presentations were followed by the question-and-answer session moderated by the chairperson. Ms. Singh asked the speakers selected questions received on the MyGov portal from the public. Ms. Singh asked Mr. Manit Jain “In the present scenario when job requirements and skill sets are changing so fast, what would you suggest that the younger generation should learn?” Mr. Jain explained that in the Heritage schools they feel that work should be done in four areas- Self (awareness about self, fears and strengths), capacity to relate (socio-emotional intelligence issues etc.), *Swabhaav* and *Swadharma* (what excites, the purpose of my life, my calling etc.) and livelihood (skills required for). He explained that livelihood should not be merely about making money, rather it should put together money, meaning for life and mastering of skills. These things when put together would lead to a holistic and joyful life.

Ms. Singh posed the next question to Mr. Yudhveer Tandon - “what should be the methods to raise the quality and sustainability of schools, particularly in rural areas?” Mr. Tandon explained that community ownership is very important for providing quality education. The interaction between students, teachers and community makes the bonds stronger and the results become visible. He referred to his presentation, where it was demonstrated how cooperation from community can be sought and how it can help in promoting good quality sustainable schools.

Ms. Singh asked Ms. Manju Balasubramanyam “what kind of sustainability challenges are faced by schools while promoting the activities as demonstrated in the presentation?”. Ms. Balasubramanyam replied that it is majorly ‘resistance to change’. People in general are not very confident about the new initiatives taken by schools. However, she insisted that the schools and staff have to keep quality and sustainability as core beliefs of personal and school life.

Confidence can be won if we are committed to the idea. She made a beautiful statement in her reply: ‘we need reflective mindset to convert that reflection into action’.

Concluding Remarks

The chairperson thanked all the participants and panelists for their valuable inputs. She remarked that many issues were traversed and numerous areas were touched upon. Quality has many dimensions. She emphasized that a more local, contextual and decentralized approach to empower teachers and students will promote good quality sustainable schools. She reiterated that this webinar was held at the right time to motivate teachers and principals across the country. She thanked the Ministry of Education for organizing the webinar, as well as CBSE and NCERT for collaborating on it.