Quality of Education
Framework Questionnaire

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Underlying Principles: The purpose of a discussion on ‘Quality’

In any process of evaluation it is important to begin with the question what is the purpose and who is it for.

Several responses to the question of the purpose in discussing quality could be valid:

- To foster a process of reflection and self-awareness of the groups involved to enable clarity about goals and a greater understanding.
- To create a dialogue between Asha and projects about expectations and future directions.
- For Asha volunteers to come to a deeper and broader understanding of what is meant by ‘quality education’ as expressed by people working in the field in different contexts and in the process to sensitize Asha volunteers about the complexities and ambiguities that are often inevitable in working in the community.
- To forge a closer collaboration between Asha and people working in the field in a spirit of exchange and dialogue.
- For Asha as the donor to be in a more informed position to judge whether this or that project is worthy of monetary support.
- To clarify for projects what Asha expects and for them to accommodate those pre-determined goals and standards to meet the requirements in order that they can prove themselves worthy recipients.

As to whom this exercise serves it could include one or all of the following categories:

1. For Asha volunteers
2. For workers in the projects themselves
3. To serve the needs of all the people related to a project.

Ideally the purpose of exploring the meaning of quality is to forge a closer collaboration between Asha and people working in the field in a spirit of exchange and dialogue.

This would mean a growth on both sides whereby people working in the field would foster a process of reflection and self-awareness to enable clarity about goals and a greater understanding. Also for Asha volunteers to come to a deeper and broader understanding of what is meant by ‘quality education’ as expressed by people working in the field in different contexts and in the process to sensitize Asha volunteers about the complexities and ambiguities that are often inevitable in working in the community. Asha volunteers in turn would also share their insights, skills and experiences to widen a perspective of those working within a particular and sometimes limited context.
As to whom this exercise is for, it is to enable both Asha volunteers and people working in schools to respond more fully and effectively to the children and communities that are involved.

The purpose then is not as a vertical or hierarchical one where schools are assessed by an external agency against a pre-conceived notion of what an ideal school should be, but essentially a collaborative one. The process would reflect some of the aspects that we are aspiring to as certain aims of education:

- A building on relationships of mutual trust,
- A constructivist approach whereby there is a shared understanding of purpose, where the other’s point of view is recognized and where there is a common search for answers so there is an active engagement in a dynamic process of change and growth.
- A concern for including people at the centre.
- A critical but open mind to explore a range of learning and teaching patterns which might include apprenticeship, mentoring and the sharing of an oral tradition
- A commitment to exploring new ways that might make learning more relevant to children’s lives outside school.

**Mutual trust**

We talk about mutual trust between teacher and learner and also management and teacher and management and the community. Trust is most fragile when one party assumes a position of ‘knower’ or takes on a position of superiority in terms of power of one kind or another including articulation and monetary power. So it would be vital to maintain also a sense of mutual trust between Asha volunteers and those working in schools or projects. This discussion must be an open one, which is receptive to questions and not a tool to shape, model or impose on another.

**Problem posing, constructivist approach**

There is a danger of falling into a framework that often alternative schools are critiquing where relations are not transactional but based on one transmitting to another, where in Freire’s terms ‘a banking model is adopted and not ‘a problem posing model’. To reach a broader understanding of quality requires us to understand another’s point of view.

We mentioned the Constructivist and social constructivist approaches in learning and it is maybe important to apply such a framework to this process itself.
People-centred

If this exercise is to become people-centred where change, growth, problems are inextricably woven then a standardized ‘blue print’ imposed from above would be inappropriate. A framework of management, quality control, uniformity might be corrosive rather than constructive.

Exploratory approach

We have seen the aims of education change, evolve sometimes swing and be manipulated by political, economic and market forces so it is imperative that we keep an open mind and be discerning about what is relevant now both in terms of the old or traditional patterns of learning and also to new possibilities. There are no definitive answers about education any more than there are single answers or fixed notions about the meaning of life itself.

Can we together evolve a set of queries that help us all to reflect on the potential of a school to promote justice, well being and peace? The following points for discussion are related to practical and everyday interactions within the school but it is these that most vividly highlight the quality of a school. These questions are posed not as a check list for an inspector to assess the school but rather as a starting point for a shared reflection on how we can best together respond to the challenge of creating a more inclusive learning community.

Below is a preliminary outline of some areas that demand more consideration, reflection and input to begin to shape answers. We have tried to look at these from within a framework of shared exploration and to ground at least some of these questions within the daily life of a school.

In conclusion each and every school has strengths and weaknesses. Sometime the particular context that a school is in acts as a constraint in realizing something more ideal for example the choice of having a more diverse student body for a variety of reasons may not be possible. Sometimes a school may not have access to people with particular skills or resources, which limit possibilities.
Framework Questionnaire: Focus Areas

The environment of the school itself
Composition of the school body
Usage of materials
Ethos of the school
Learning
Different kinds of learning:
  Supporting independent learning
  Positive communication
  Learning styles
  The curriculum
Evaluation
Relationships:
  School and families
  School and the community
  Within the school
    Between children
    Between teachers
    Between teachers and children
  Management
  Outreach
Active engagement in raising levels of awareness

Note: Please do not limit yourself to yes or no answers. Elaborate with examples wherever possible.

The environment of the school itself
Please elaborate on any specific considerations that went into the design of the school and classrooms.
1. Does the school provide a lit, well-ventilated clean space for children to learn in? Are there outside safe spaces for children to play? Yes, kids go to government schools which have the needed facilities. As far as a playground in concerned, I am not sure about all schools. Avehi supports more than 900 schools.
2. What are the ways by which the school creates a stimulating environment for learning? [For example, do displays, pictures and charts relate to what the children are learning to reflect concerns about social issues and the environment? How frequently are displays changed, added to or extended? How could children be more involved in the selection process?] Avehi Abacus uses the Sangati kits which are based off of charts, displays etc, to promote learning about social issues, health, environment and other topics.
3. Are levels of noise a distraction from concentrated learning? Could there be a possibility of creating quiet spaces and quiet times? Since the scope of this
project is huge, I can’t speak for all schools. Some schools might have noise issues but we have not heard any negative feedback as yet.

4. Who is responsible for maintaining the physical environment? Can the children be more involved in caring for the buildings and compound? Not sure but can find out. I would guess there is staff assigned to maintain grounds.


6. Is there access to toilets? Yes, there is.

7. Is drinking water available? Yes, there is.

8. Does the school provide facilities for children with physical disabilities? Don’t know.

Usage of Materials

Are materials used efficiently and economically?

1. Are natural and waste materials used in creative ways? How could they be better utilized? Sangati kits are reused but the worksheets may be getting trashed. Hard to say what the kids do with their work.

2. How far are children responsible for the storage and distribution of materials? Teachers handle the kits.

Composition of the School Body

1. What is the basis of selection of the pupils? Since Avehi Abacus works with kids in government schools, the basic rules of admission apply.
   - Geographical proximity
   - Intellectual ability
   - Community or religious identity
   - Economic background.
   - Intellectual Inability (recognition of special needs of learning difficulties)

2. In what ways could the school include a greater diversity? Government schools do not have restrictions for admissions so this question does not apply.
   - Economic
   - Religious
   - Caste and class
   - Linguistic groups
   - Differently abled children

3. In what ways does the teaching staff, management and maintenance staff represent diversity in terms of gender, community, and differently abled persons? Don’t know.
Ethos of the school

1. What are the rules of the school? What purpose do they serve? Are they flexible? What are the unwritten laws of the school? What do the children understand as the rules and their reasons?
2. What things are celebrated and why?
3. In cultural programmes what proportion of children are included? What is the basis of selection?
4. Do the cultural items selected reflect the cultural diversity of the school and the community? What kind of values do we want to communicate?
5. What is the purpose of excursions? Are the distance and expense justified? What local places might be visited? How could all be included?
6. What kinds of achievement and success are commemorated? Are achievements in areas other than sports and academic excellence recognized in public? How can we avoid labeling of high achievers and children with learning difficulties and yet at the same time meet their specific needs?
7. Does the timetable reflect a concern with creating a balanced use of time?

It is hard to answer the questions above due to the nature of the schools and the project.

Learning

Different kinds of learning

1. In what ways does the school try to integrate art, music, craft, drama and movement into other areas of learning?
2. How does the school include the opportunity for children to respond imaginatively and sympathetically to different aspects of the curriculum, for example to poetry, stories, environmental issues etc.?
3. What role does work have in the school? Does the school alienate students from physical work? *Does the work in the local community – such as agriculture or masonry or carpentry – have a place in the school? What does this mean from a theoretical point of view? From the communities point of view?
4. What is the importance given to sports and physical activities? What are the provisions for sports and physical activities? *
5. How can we break down the conventional divide between so-called scholastic and non-scholastic learning For example can craft be integrated into the
teaching of geometry or physics? Can the skills of masonry or carpentry be correlated with learning math or science concepts?

Government schools have their own timetable. Avehi does involve kids to participate freely and creatively. Community learning is encouraged so is teaching them the importance of being active, health etc. We hope the methods teachers learn by using the Sangati kits will be used to teach the basic academic curriculum. Many teachers are doing so and hopefully others will join in too.

**Supporting independent learning**

1. Do children have easy access to libraries and other resources?
2. Does the library include books related to social concerns?
3. How can the school positively acknowledge and support different paces of learning for example by providing additional and challenging work for some children to work on independently when they have finished particular tasks?
4. How is the child supported to become an independent reader and writer?
5. How is the child encouraged to access information for example in the regular usage of dictionaries, reference books, maps, newspapers etc.?

These questions do not relate directly to the Avehi’s mission/goals but the fact remains that since Avehi Abacus’s program is conducted in government schools, basic facilities are provided.

**Positive communication**

1. Are there spaces for children to share with each other their learning, interests and experiences?
2. Is time given for reflection and open-ended questions? How is the child’s home experience brought into the school domain?
3. Is the child’s home language (s) acknowledged and used as a resource when it is different from the standard language?
4. Is there a serious effort to understand dialects as different rather than deficient and to make the necessary bridge to use standard language?
5. What are the issues involved when English becomes the medium of instruction?
6. What are the advantages of a multilingual classroom?

Part of the mission of Avehi Abacus’s program is encouraging unity in diversity along with giving kids the opportunity to be creative. The program is taught in a few different languages to accommodate kids’ language comforts.

**The curriculum**
1) Does the school as a body take a critical view of the prescribed curriculum and voice its concerns about the inappropriate or excessive demands on children when necessary and possible?

2) Can the school take a critical stance towards the textbook in detecting bias, prejudice and stereotyping?

   How can the content of the text book be made more meaningful for the children? How can it be supplemented? Can those ideas be shared with other teachers?

The first two points do not apply to Avehi though the hope is that we can take the biases out of children's lives through proper implementation of the Sangati kits. Sangati kits are a supplement to the regular curriculum and encourage teacher learning and sharing of ideas.

**Evaluation**

1. How is the purpose of evaluation understood?
2. Do assessments test only memory retention and reproduction or do they test for cognitive understanding and application of concepts? *
   (This could perhaps be expanded to include the complexities of understanding and application and not be too reductionist by posing it as an either/or question.)
3. How could the school provide learners and parents with feedback on what is happening vis-à-vis learning? *
4. Could there be other way of assessment than individual written uniform tests for example an explanation, project work, group presentation etc? ?
5. How could assessment become a positive tool for teacher and child? Are evaluations used as a means of feedback for the teacher to evaluate his or her own self.
6. What is the understanding of failure and success?
7. What kind of healthy perspective could be nurtured of external assessment systems when there is a conflict with another way of evaluation promoted by the school?
8. Is the evaluation of students a continuous (daily) process?

Since Avehi is a supplementary learning tool, evaluations do not come in the picture with regards to kids. Teachers are trained to implement the program correctly. There are field supervisors who monitor classes on a regular basis to provide feedback and support.

**Relationships**

**School and families**

1. In what ways are parents and family members included in the school?
2. What provision is made for individual parents to meet teachers and voice concerns?
3. Are parents consulted when school policies are changed? How are they informed?
4. What are the kinds of problems that arise because of differences in expectations of parents and the school’s vision? How are these differences addressed?
5. How do parents perceive the cultural and social ethos of the school when it is different from a mainstream cultural context?
   • *Some of the ambiguity and complexity of the challenge is highlighted below.

   “Balancing the parental aspirations and the aims and objectives of the school is one of the most difficult tasks in running an effective school. The school cannot alienate the parents, it needs their active participation in making the school successful. But the school cannot simply capitulate to all parental demands. The vexing situation in India now is the issue of medium of instruction in the primary school. Viewing English as the means for social and economic mobility all parents want to send their children to English medium schools, but educational theory strongly points to the effectiveness and appropriateness of mother-tongue as the medium of instruction in primary school. How does the school balance these opposing demands?”

   Not truly applicable to our case.

School and the community

1. Does the school serve or contribute to the community in any way?
2. Are pupils encouraged to contribute to the welfare of the local community for example by care of the elderly?
3. How is the community and local environment used as a resource for the school?
4. Is there a modicum of cooperation, sans undue interference, from local bodies like Panchayat, Parent–Teacher Association and the school’s HM and govt appointed teachers?

   Not applicable or as far as I know, practiced.

Within the school

Between children
1. In what ways are older children responsible for younger children, newcomers or guests?
2. Are there occasions for exchanges and sharing between classes of different ages?
3. In what ways are group activities fostered in non-competitive ways?

First two points are not applicable. The implementation of Sangati kits involves the essence of point number three.

**Between teachers**

1. Do teachers of different subjects and classes interact in constructive ways to enrich the curriculum? Does the school have subject-specific teachers? **Not applicable.**
2. Are teachers encouraged to reflect on their classroom practice and how it affects children positively and negatively? Do the teachers consciously strive to **improve** their qualification, delivery mechanisms, their depth and spread of knowledge, their ability for abstract and logical thinking and problem solving abilities? Do they repeatedly and sensitively attempt to transmit these abilities to the children? **We hope that teachers learn and improve their skills with the help provided by Sangati kit training sessions and implementation in class.**
3. What is the workload of the teachers? Do they have preparatory time and correction time during the school hours? Are they expected to work beyond school hours? **Teachers do need to put in a little extra time to prepare for the implementation of these kits in class. Thankfully, most of them are open and willing to do so. All the teaching is done during school hours.**
4. Are the teachers able to manage the expectations of the school management, parents and the students? Is there a reasonable guarantee that REWARD appointed teachers are not exploited for works other than teaching? **Most schools are doing well with the program.**
5. Has the school provided adequate number of teachers to deliver quality education? What is the Pupil Teacher Ratio? Is the Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) low enough for teachers to provide individual attention to students in a child-centric learning environment? How do the economics of this ratio work out? **Not applicable.**
6. Are the teachers being provided opportunities for professional mobility and growth? **There are regular teacher training sessions provided to implement the Sangati kits. Since this is not a part of the regular academic curriculum, there is no direct correlation to professional growth but the hope is that the skills learnt through these training sessions will help them with regular classes which in turn would help them to succeed in their careers.**
7. How is the professional contribution of teachers valued by the system? What are the mechanisms for recognizing and appreciating teacher contributions? Not applicable.

8. What is the self-perception of the teachers? Do they look at themselves as professionals who are capable of functioning autonomously or do they perceive that they are mere functionaries who are implementing the plans of the 'management' or the school system? Most teachers seem to have embraced the material.

9. What are the provisions for increasing the autonomy of the teachers? How much of their work is prescribed and what is the flexibility available to them to perform their professional duties? Since this program needs a lot of creativity, teachers can be flexible in their methods of imparting the curriculum.

10. In what decisions of the school are teachers involved? Are they involved in academic decisions, management decisions, financial decisions, and enrollment decisions? Not applicable.

11. What are the accountability structures for the teachers? Are they held accountable to not just the school management and school system but also to the students and parents? Is the structure transparent and non-arbitrary? Not applicable.

12. What are the terms and conditions for employment, payment and security and termination of services? Not applicable.

13. If the organization has appointed additional teachers to supplement govt school staff, is there a passable cooperation between Govt appointed teachers and teachers appointed by the organization? Is there a reasonable guarantee that teachers appointed by the organization are not exploited for work other than teaching? Not applicable.

**Between teachers and children**

*A point for discussion:*

*What we are teaches the child far more than what we say, so we must be what we want our children to become. Joseph Chiltern Pearce*

1. How do teachers listen and talk to children? What kind of questions are asked and by whom? The program is very interactive in nature and promotes/encourages kids to ask questions.

2. How can teachers more effectively scaffold learning to meet the child’s present understanding and recognize the next step ahead? Not applicable.

3. Do teachers share the concerns of the organization on helping first generation student attain reasonable academic proficiency needed for the class that they are in? Do they refrain from propagating the standard rhetoric on the incapability / inefficiencies of such students? Not applicable.
4. Do the teachers repeatedly and sensitively attempt to promote abilities in the children for abstract and logical thinking and problem solving abilities and increase their depth and breadth of knowledge? Not applicable.

5. Do the teachers attempt to sensitively raise the bars w.r.t the current levels that the children are in with respect to their performance? Not applicable.

6. Do the teachers spare additional time for the students where required by conducting special / extra classes or provide mentoring support? Not applicable.

**Areas of conflict**

1. How are children encouraged to reflect on the consequences of their actions?

2. What happens when rules are broken?
   - What is considered appropriate punishment? Who decides?

   Not applicable.

**Management**

1. In what way does the management support teachers' initiatives, autonomy and creativity? The management has to make sure there is classroom time available to implement the kits. After that teachers get to teach the program with minimal rigidity.

2. In what ways and to whom do teachers feel accountable to? Not applicable.

3. Is the school well networked in terms of academic support? * Not applicable.

4. Is the school well-networked in terms of financial support? * Not applicable.

5. Is the organization providing an ambience for the teachers to improve their capabilities and capacities? Does the organization have or have access to resource persons to meet the demands of the purpose of the organization? All resources are provided by Avehi along with training sessions and in class field supervisors.

6. Is the organization continually improving its assessment methods and prescription to reward and to highlight specific talents?

7. Is the organization striving to gradually shift from enhanced performance to enhanced learning outcomes?

8. Does the school incorporate the parents concerns and wishes in the curriculum?

9. Is the school open to visits from the parents? Is there transparency? Are the parents allowed to observe classes? Not applicable.

Avehi does get feedback and works to improve the program and implementation.
Outreach

1. How does the school endeavor to share its resources, expertise and strengths? **Not applicable.**

2. Do children share their experiences and learning beyond the school setting for example in a science *mela* or a marathon run or workshops that include other children? The goal is to have kids use their knowledge in their lives outside of school.

3. How could helpful reading material in different languages be made more available? Who could help in the task of translation so that more books could be accessible to more teachers? The program is taught in a few different languages to accommodate kids from different backgrounds.

Active engagement in raising levels of awareness

1. How can the school further develop a critical view for social transformation in terms of:
   a. Gender
   b. Caste
   c. Communalism
   d. Nationalism*
   e. Consumerism and the impact of the media.
      (It should be noted here that levels of consumerism have been seriously suggested as a criterion to measure success of education by the World Bank report in their publication *Primary Education in India.*)
   f. Health and well-being

2. How are children prepared for functioning within a democracy? (*Eklavya*’s discussion and publications on the teaching of Civics is particularly helpful here.)

3. Is there any reflection on the rights and duties of citizenship? (Note the book, *Steps in the Rights Direction* would be a good resource to share with teachers.)

   The program is geared to cover these topics and is very relevant to the topics mentioned above and fits the bill very well.