

Some effective participatory tools for evaluating school quality

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Two million children attend primary school each year in Sri Lanka, which is one of the few countries in the region that has the potential to attain the millennium goal in education by 2015 AD. Donors have pledged their eager support to such countries. Further quality primary education is a child right. Thus, more education research is necessary towards making informed plans for making the lot of children better. The tools presented here were developed for a study on school quality, as child participation was scientifically and ethically warranted by the study. Popular participatory techniques modified to make them child-friendly were used to obtain children's perspectives on education provision for example-mapping to identify and locate material resources, transect walk to assess material quality, trend analysis to ascertain teaching patterns and teaching efficiency and problem ranking. Web diagrams were used for comparing teacher-ability and teaching quality regarding four subjects. Participant observation and focus group discussions with teachers and parents were conducted thereafter for checking the validity of the data obtained. All exercises were conducted within the minimum risk limit for using children as research subjects, according to accepted guidelines, not violating local cultural norms and were voluntary. Informed consents were obtained from parents, schools and all relevant education authorities. The results obtained were in accordance with usual participatory research methods. The rating of material resources done by children coincided well with that done by teachers. The rating of teachers done both by children and adults however showed different degrees of variation based on the area studied. In all schools the children indicated the enjoyment of the exercises. The whole exercise created a spirit of research and ownership among children. Further better awareness of the school environment and the educational rights of children were created among stakeholders. Children and parents learnt some basic community research methodologies. It is possible therefore to use participatory tools to assess the quality of a school by service-users to a useful degree.

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