

Read India

A mass scale, rapid, 'learning to read' campaign.
A foundation for achieving national/ global goals
of
Universal Elementary Education

The pilot phase of Pratham's accelerated reading program
Jan 2003- Jun 2003

And continuing beyond.....

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Mahatma Gandhi walked 300 km for 23 days in 1930 and picked up salt¹.
Hundreds of thousands followed him, and the history of India was changed.

Today, you do not have to walk 300 km. You do not pick up salt.

Pick up a book, and read it with a few children for 23 days.

Hundreds of thousands will join you,
and the history of India will be changed,
once again.

¹ The "salt satyagraha" the civil disobedience protest against the salt tax of the British Empire is one of the biggest landmarks in the Indian independence movement.

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A Trick Question:

If an average school-age child from a poor family in India can learn to read in six weeks or less, how long will it take to get every Indian child reading, assuming that 80 million Indian children cannot read?

If you answered, “six weeks!”, you are almost right. But, when we come down to reality, why does the answer tend to infinity. Can we bring the answer down to an exciting “two years!”. Or even a reasonable “five years”?

Project Read India is about getting every child reading in a short-predictable time frame. Of course, reading is not the end, it is the first step. Already 150,000 children have taken this step, and a few million more will make it one giant leap over the next year.

The project started in January 2003. Over the last six months, the project and the reading technique has been replicated and scaled up in seven different states and five different languages (Hindi, Marathi, Gujrati, Kannada, and Urdu). Now, it is metamorphosing into a campaign to catalyze learning on a massive scale. In 2003-04, it is likely to affect over 5 million children.

A child goes through school for four years and at the end of this period, often he or she cannot even read. The per child expenditure of Rs. 8,000 over four years is almost wasted. This can be made productive by investing less than Rs. 100 per child or even a tenth of that if school teachers use the technique innovated by Pratham.

Archimedes is said to have claimed, “Give me a fulcrum, and a long enough lever. I will move the earth”. The reading technique innovated by Pratham is the fulcrum which can move the oppressive burden of illiteracy and poor education that India’s children carry.

The Problem:

Government of India statistics show that 89 out of 100 children enter schools in India but 40% of those who join school dropout before completing primary education (grade IV or V). Another 30% of the remaining, dropout before completing grade VII or VIII. Thus nearly 80% of children in India do not complete elementary education in a country that has recorded 64% literacy. This is an indicator of the status of literacy in India in the third millennium.

Why do children drop out of school at an early age? Lack of learning in school is probably the single most important reason. On an average 50%

of school going children in government schools do not know the 3 R's even after four years of schooling. This is the most visible and demoralizing comment on the status of education in India.

Pratham has conducted detailed house to house surveys in the most deprived urban slums of Mumbai and other cities of the state of Maharashtra. The data for 140,000 children between the ages of 6 to 14 surveyed in these slum communities show the following:

Children can read	% children
Simple paragraphs	25
Words but not sentences	23
Alphabets but not words	28
Nothing	24

Pratham experience across India in over 26 urban locations suggests that the situation is worse in the Northern states of India. It is likely that the situation with reading in the Southern states is similar to the Western states like Maharashtra and Gujarat.

Look at the basic numbers:

- Estimates suggest that the percentage of children who can read nothing and those who can read only alphabets is about 52%
- across the country, 11% do not enter school and 40% children drop out before completing primary school.

It is probably more than a coincidence that these two numbers match so closely.

Pratham has maintained that a learning child is not withdrawn from school, at least at the primary education level. When the child is not learning, when the school is ineffective, all other links related to poverty become active. This results in the child dropping out or being withdrawn from school by parents. If the child is not in school, he or she wanders about on the streets, hangs around in the neighborhood or is pressed into work on family farm or business. Some children end up working for wages disguised as apprenticeship or as blatant bonded labor/ highly exploited wage labor.

Therefore, improving achievement in schools is intrinsically linked with higher enrollment and retention rates critical to achieving universalization of elementary education.

Under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) scheme, the Government of India has declared,

1. Every child 6-14 will be enrolled in schools by 2003
2. Every child 10+ will have completed 4 years of education by 2007

3. Every child up to the age of 14 will have completed 8 years of schooling by 2010.

Other goals are included within the macro-goals above.

Daunting supply-side issues loom large. For example: lack of classrooms and teachers, that will be needed to deal with the 40% children who dropped out earlier but who have to be retained in the school system as a result of SSA initiatives. On the demand side, the failure to provide infrastructure is also related to a lack of assertive demands from parents, which would pressurize the government system.

Pratham feels that creation of an articulate, vociferous demand for 'good' education resulting in visible basic learning will create the necessary pressure on the system.

Pratham efforts thus far:

Over the years, Pratham has been engaged in three major types of grassroot level activities: mainstreaming out of school children, providing remedial education to in-school children in order to bring them up to basic literacy-numeracy levels, and preparing pre-schoolers to enter formal school.

Pratham efforts are large scale not usually expected of NGOs. However, the 220,000 children served by Pratham in 2002-03 is a very small number relative to the size of the national problem.

Pratham has always aspired to catalyze larger efforts and to impact the governmental system through a demonstration effect of cost-effective solutions. These efforts have been partially successful. The terminology of 'remedial education' and short term 'bridge classes' has become a part of the SSA document and education policy literature in general. It is also true that Pratham has been able to create partnerships with various governments to deliver these services. But, in the past, the burden of delivery has always fallen on Pratham while the government remained a willing but passive partner.

There have been two major weaknesses in the Pratham program:

1. In Pratham classes children made progress, but the learning achievement was less than desired.
2. Pratham was not able to impact the governmental system and make it significantly more effective or efficient in any visible way.

Looking for solutions:

Obsessed with a magic wand (the fulcrum):

The two weaknesses described above were linked. It was important for Pratham to demonstrate that qualitative jump in learning achievement was possible. The acceleration in learning had to be achieved with considerable predictability and at a fast pace even under constraints of poorly educated human resources available in slum communities. If this could be demonstrated, the impact making-ability of Pratham would multiply many-fold given our presence on a relatively large scale in most major cities of India².

This has formed the motivation for continuous experimentation and innovation in Pratham, in addition to adding the “best” possible “value” to children in Pratham classes.

It was important to have predictable success in a predictable short period. We wanted a magic wand that would wake up and shake up people who felt that the children of the poor could not achieve much in schools. In fact, very recently, an unaware very senior official publicly stated that even if the children could sign their names at the end of four years in school, it would be enough!!

The expectations are so low because we do not trust the children, and we do not trust ourselves. This is so because we feel that fast and visible change is not possible; we are completely demoralized. Boosting morale is probably the single most important step in order to bring about a major change.

If we could bring about an “overnight” change on a mass scale with a magic wand, it could galvanize the entire school establishment. This is not written as an afterthought, it was a part of a conscious, even if half serious, thinking within Pratham.

Origins of the Innovation:

The question was, is there a magic wand out there waiting to be discovered?

² Pratham started in Mumbai in 1994. Over the years, through local initiatives, Pratham initiatives have started 11 cities+ 250 villages in Maharashtra, 6 cities+ Kutchch in Gujrat, 3 cities in Rajasthan, Delhi, 2 cities in Uttar Pradesh, two locations in Bihar, three cities in Karnataka, Chennai, and a rural region in Andhra Pradesh.

The dissatisfaction regarding the achievement quality in our programs led us to think about the hurdles in our way. Clearly, in more controlled and small-scale work with intensive use of high quality human resources, it was possible to teach children to read and write. However, we wanted a mass-scale easily replicable solution to suit our needs and the larger context.

Limitations of the Pratham program are:

1. Instructors are themselves poorly educated. Mostly young women from slum communities, they have graduated (or sometime not even that) for the local government school. They are themselves products of the poor school system. Their own educational foundation is weak.
2. Funds are limited. Pratham has been successful in mobilizing close to USD 2.0 million in 2003-04 through various non-governmental resources in India and abroad. But considering that we served over 220,000 children, no more than \$ 10 per child can be made available. As numbers of children to be served grow larger, funds will become even more limiting. Hence the solution must help in reducing the cost and not increasing it.
3. Transmission loss in training. This is a universal phenomenon. Although Pratham's training model emphasizes on-the-job help through Trainer-Monitors, the work in slums, villages, and even schools, monitoring and supervision is limited by the diffused nature of the program activities. This puts severe constraints on ensuring that all that is delivered in training is absorbed and used on the ground. Often instructors relapse into using old methods in a crude way.
4. Lack of predictability of results. Due to combination of all these factors, it was very difficult to standardize predictable achievement results at the end of a defined time period. We could not hold our own system accountable to deliver predictable results. There were always excuses.

Most of these issues are not unique to Pratham alone, they are problems faced by schooling systems in the developing world.

In addition, we had never seen ourselves as 'educationists' or experts in education methodology. Instead we relied on strategies and methods used by school systems. These were all geared to teaching a child to learn in steps from age 6 onwards over a period of four years. However, the child would be attending Pratham classes for about a year and no more. Naturally, it was difficult to get

past the achievement expected of a child by the end of one or two years of schooling within this one year.

In short, we were very dissatisfied, and were asking ourselves quite seriously, "Isn't there a magic wand that will help us change the learning status of a child almost overnight?" A clear, simple technique that would help us achieve this goal was missing. The 'magic wand' had to be found.

In 2001-02, an opportunity arose to experiment with a fresh start in new areas when Ballarpur Industries decided to support Pratham to expand its work in 6 new cities of Maharashtra. Ten young women and two young men community leaders, who had grown from the ranks of instructors in Mumbai, volunteered to go to these new locations and set up large-scale projects. Other project leaders in Mumbai and rural Maharashtra were selected to join them in a team that would focus on qualitative achievement among children. Simultaneously, in the projects in the North, teams were created to focus on learning achievement.

We pegged the 'transmission loss' in training as the key issue and decided to have the Maharashtra team of about 24 people meet at the end of every month to discuss a monthly goal and the means to achieve it. A plan was prepared for activities to be conducted over about 20 working days. The experiences would be discussed at the next month-end meeting to prepare plans for the next month.

The Math-magic wand:

The first innovation resulting from these efforts was to abandon the sequential method of learning arithmetic. Typically children are first taught numbers, followed by simple addition-subtraction with one digit numbers, then the concept of units and tens, then addition with carry over etc etc. Instead we came up with an integrated activity.

We asked ourselves. Where do school-age children learn most rapidly? Arguably, this happens where children of the neighborhood get together in the backyard to play with no adults interfering. Here, a young child joins the older children and learns to play a whole game from day one. He/ she learns the rules while playing. NO ONE STARTS BY LEARNING THE RULES OF THE GAME. The rules are discovered and used as children hone their skills. In fact, when parents try to teach little kids rules of the games, they get impatient.

So, why not treat learning of maths like a game? Why start with concepts? Let the children engage in activities and learn as they go along. After all, arithmetic is all about manipulation of tangible quantities and accounting for the activities in a certain systematic written form, whether addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division.

We found that if four types of class activities (“say-do-read-write”) are integrated together, learning was rapid:

1. Say something: Learn to say numbers from 1 to 100 and then up to 1000 or more. Once you know the pattern of numbers and know how to “say” numbers to 100, moving far beyond is relatively easy.
2. Do something: Count pointing to objects or with objects as you say the numbers.
3. Read something: Reading numbers: for example read $4 + 6 = 10$ as “four and six make 10” whether in text or as an equation.
4. Write something : Record what you do. First write numbers, then learn to account for quantities as you count, add and subtract in a formal way.

The key in this was to tell the children to make a ‘bundle’ of 10 straws while counting and then work with these bundles and loose straws to do the operations and account for them as they added, subtracted, multiplied or divided.

So, almost from the very first day the children became engrossed in different types of activities based on word problems that were said out loud.

We tested the innovation and concluded that children learnt numbers, and addition- subtraction with carryover / borrowing in less than a month. Later, we have ascertained that learning basics of multiplication and division is also a matter of a month and no more for the age group of 7-8 years and above. This was suitable for children out of school and also for the in-school children who were lagging behind.

The Pratham team became confident that rapid and guaranteed learning was possible even with the given human resources.

This was the first magic wand. An almost overnight change from not being able to do maths to learning to add -subtract using two-three digit numbers with ease within a month!

The next question was.

Is there a magic wand for learning to read and write?

The reading-magic:

Simultaneous with the arithmetic experiments, we decided to start with a ‘story’ as a text to learn to read. A small story-book based on Shivaji, the king who gave Maharashtra a clear political identity in the 17th century was created for use in Maharashtra. Shivaji’s childhood is a part of the government history textbook. His

stories are recounted in every Maharashtrian household. The method used was the same as in the textbook except that we started with a story and did not worry about the sequence in which the consonants or vowel signs came. We did not limit the number of consonants and vowel signs to be taught in the beginning. But, each page of the story actually involved an increasing number of these, beginning with 6 consonants (out of 34) and three vowels (out of 12).

However, this method needed a lot of practice with worksheets, and the accompanying worksheets made up 60 A4 size papers while the 'primer' was barely 10 pages half the size!

The method resulted in good reading writing achievement in Ralegaon block of Yeotmal district and other locations in Maharashtra outside Mumbai. But it still needed considerable training. After 4-6 months we could demonstrate good reading-writing skills among children.

The Pratham Gujrat group adapted the 'Shivaji' primer method and accompanying worksheets to suit Gujrati condition. They used the story of the movie Lagaan, which is set in Kutchch- the part of Gujrat affected by a massive earthquake in 2001. Lagaan, the movie, had become immensely popular and was also an Oscar nominee in 2002.

Both these attempts led to more assured results, however, replication required a lot of effort and there was no 'overnight' visible change. It was an improvement over the past but not the magic wand that we wanted.

In September 2002, Professor Jalaluddin, an acknowledged expert in literacy, described his use of the traditional chart of the 'barakhadi' as a means of coding and decoding words. He said that he had success with school-going children when taught by properly trained instructors who worked in a systematic way. His work showed that children could read and write in a matter of three months using his method. This had been tried and tested in several hundred schools of W. Bengal and Bangladesh.

We began to think: if we focused solely on reading as an independent activity, leaving aside writing for now, perhaps there could be much more rapid progress.

A new technique was crudely thought out using the integrated approach to learning that we had done in the maths experiment. Do it like a game; no sequential learning, integrate saying, doing, reading, and writing.

First inkling of possibilities arose when a young lady in Delhi, Zubeida, reported that out of 108 children who could not read, 32% started reading in a month when she followed the integrated method that had been discussed in the previous month's meeting. The experiment and the data did not appear clear. But, in the monthly North India group meeting various team leaders were asked

to further experiment with the technique. A month later, in October, the Patna group came back excitedly talking about children learning to read rapidly. Another young lady, Sunita, who had experimented said, "I am not sure how, but we did all these activities and the children seemed to 'pluck' something out of the air, and they had learnt!" . It was probably the most perfect observation about how children were learning.

When children are engaged in a variety of activities which have implicit interconnections, they make the connections and these snowball into a larger skill.

In early December 2002, we decided to organize the technique a bit better and also simultaneously create a video-record of the 'before' and 'after' in a span of one month. In the end, we could allow ourselves only twenty-one days of actual learning experiment. The results of this experiment in the Mustafabad area of East Delhi are on a film – ".....And Now I can read .". The experiment was validated by a market research agency. There were many shortcomings, which were corrected later, and a cold wave struck Delhi right in the middle of the experiment. Yet, the video record of the progress made by children startled everyone who saw it.

Children starting at different levels of reading ability had progressed to different but higher levels of reading ability in 21 days! Those who knew not even the alphabets, were reading sentences haltingly and those who could read words only with difficulty but could not read sentences fluently graduated to good reading. And they were very confident and smiling.

This was the magic wand we were looking for.

We cautioned ourselves, and others, that 21 days was not a sacrosanct number. There have been many cases where whole batches of children, especially those going to school but not able to read, having learnt to read in two weeks. But the progress in the 21 day period was a strong indication of the kind of rapid pace that was possible and that we had not imagined before. In fact, we have now come to the conclusion that an average child being taught by an average teacher would take no more than 4-6 weeks to become very fluent in reading. At the same time, children begin to write by themselves expressing their thoughts in a crude way.

Within six months of our experimenting with the new innovation and collecting evidence of its success, it is spreading rapidly to different parts of India in our own programs, governmental school systems, and it is also being adopted by NGOs. But, before discussing the replication, it is important to describe the technique itself.

It is also important to note here that we were ignorant of various theories and methods used around the world excepting a general idea of the phonic and phonemic methods. In India, we learnt about Professor Jalaluddin's work, which had led to startling progress. Ignorance, in this case seems to have helped us in overcoming mental barriers - they did not exist!.

We experimented purely on the basis of what we observed among children. We saw that children learn to play the entire game and not its parts and we translated this observation into the 'integrated' learning exercise of saying, doing, reading, and writing.

The accelerated learning-to-read technique:

The technique begins with assessing children's current reading ability. Each child is assessed one on one. The categories are simple:

1. Story readers (very fluent with at least age appropriate reading material)
2. Paragraph readers (fluent with simple paragraphs with simple words with all complexities of usage of consonants and vowel signs) Here the child has a sense of reading a sentence and a set of sentences that are linked.
3. Word readers (can read most simple words but do not read a sentence as one connected string representing a thought.)
4. Letter (alphabets) readers: These children do not read a whole word but alphabets in words or alphabets by themselves.
5. No reading at all.

This broad classification is based on our observation of how children read Indian languages. In listening to children trying to read, one can see the influences of the techniques used in school. Children are taught alphabets and then introduced in a stepwise way to the use of vowel signs. This interference of 'rules' of literacy in learning the 'game of reading' is quite evident. We also observe that as the children learn through this technique, the classification contours blur.

The blurring happens because the new technique starts with 'reading' (even imitating reading as 3-4 year olds do in households where they are read to regularly) from the first day. Children try to make sense of what they see. They 'read' sentences. They stumble to make sense, they try to guess what the words might be³. If adults do not interfere with criticism or over-enthusiastic assistance, the children learn by themselves. Adults just need to give a smile of encouragement, nudge the child towards the answer without actually answering, and ask an occasional question to help the child correct herself. Anything beyond that can slow down the pace.

Teaching learning materials:

Four types of teaching learning materials are used

- I. A bunch of alphabet cards- one card per alphabet, which children can take home and bring back to the class. (this is for children who do not know alphabets.)
- II. The "barakhadi" (twelve sounds) chart – one chart for each child. This has consonants in the first column and each row starting with the consonant shows how vowel signs are added to the consonant to

³ A child found it difficult to read "Father comes home in the evening. He chats with mother." He seemed to think, "this doesn't make sense!" Our writer, while being sensitive, was clearly not in tune with reality!

make letters for each sound such as ka, kaa, ki, kee, ku, koo, kay, kai, ko, kow etc. a

- III. Lots of paragraph cards (about 50-100 per class of 20) or papers with 4-5 line simple paragraphs using short, simple sentences in big font. For example: "My aunt visited us. She brought gifts for all. I like my aunt. She is fun."
- IV. A set of 6-8 simple stories printed on separate sheets, slightly higher degree of difficulty than the simple paragraphs. Each child gets one set of stories. In some cases we have tried even description of the solar system and classification of animals, which are a part of the grade IV syllabus.

The barakhadi chart, as Professor Jalaluddin puts it, is the coding and decoding machine of sounds. All the sounds (except for joint consonants such as "pr" in "practice, 'ps' as in gypsy.. etc) of the Indian languages (excepting Urdu) are codified in such charts, which were in use for centuries only to be abandoned by educationists in favor of 'modern' theories of learning languages. Now, the 'barakhadi' is making a come back!!!

The joint consonants have always posed a problem and teachers (including in Pratham, naturally) have found it difficult to teach. In the present technique, we have not bothered to teach the association of the sound with the combination of letters. As far as reading goes, the children just pick up the sounds as they go along. For writing, they need to practice, in the next stage.

The short paragraphs and stories are used from the first day to 'play' the game of reading. As children become familiar with the forms in the barakhadi chart, they use the stories and paragraphs to practice reading more and more.

In schools, where the technique was replicated by teachers on a large scale, only the first two were used along with other teaching learning materials available in the school, including textbooks, thus avoiding additional costs.

The cost of an ideal set of materials described above can be anywhere from Rs. 5 to 15 per child (USD 0.1 to 0.3 per child) depending upon the kind of paper used and whether the printed material is multicolored or not. On a mass scale, the order of magnitude translates into millions and billions rather quickly.

Activities:

There are three main activities in the class depending upon its composition.

- 1) Reading a 'story' aloud while pointing with the finger at each word. (20 mins):

- a) The instructor begins the first day by asking, "Who would like to read like I do?" and reads the story (one copy of which is in each child's hand) clearly but calmly without dramatization. The teacher reads loudly, pronouncing each word clearly and pointing with her finger to each word as she reads. Children watch and listen. Then the children may discuss the story. The teacher reads again pointing at each word and this time children use their own index fingers on their own page and go along.
 - b) Now it is the children's turn to attempt to read. Even the ones who do not know letters try to imitate their teacher while trying to recall the exact words of the story. Of course, on day one, the finger is pointing at different places but the children help each other or learn from each other. The teacher merely asks different children to read and helps them only occasionally.
 - c) One story is used for three days and a new story is picked up rather than waiting for everyone to 'master' the story.
- 2) Using the barakhadi (the consonant vowel chart): (20 mins)
- a) The instructor asks the children to listen carefully as she recites the sequence of sounds derived from consonants and then asks children to try the corresponding sequence with other consonants. (The children who do not know consonants are given a few (any) alphabet cards to take home so that they can learn to associate the sound with the shape. Within a few days they know how to use the barakhadi chart too).
 - b) Next, the children are asked to say any word, find its components (sounds) in the barakhadi chart, and copy its shape on a notebook or a paper. In the reverse order, they are given a few written words and asked to find the individual sounds written in it (consonants with vowel signs) in the barakhadi chart. This is the activity of coding and decoding words.
- 3) Learning with rhyming words : (10 mins or as needed)
- a) Often children can recite by rote the twelve forms of the letter made out of the same consonants. Hence, a game of rhyming words is played so that children see the use of the vowel sign.
 - b) In fact, often in the beginning, children code the sounds in a word wrong and when asked to decode the same, find their own mistake and correct it. This makes it easier for the children to look at words in the reading activity with increasing clarity and guessing the full word from a few letters and the context.
- 4) Say anything, write anything- activity designed to help the children move away from the habit of waiting for the teacher to dictate or instruct what to write. Children are baffled at first since this is not their concept of 'school'. Later they enjoy their freedom and a lot of things come out in words and on paper. This is crude writing in the beginning, but many older children graduate to writing essays and stories. It helps in reading fluency by supporting the thought process.

Organizing the class:

Organizing time and organizing children are both important matters.

Group learning is clearly much more effective. However, there are different opinions about whether children with same abilities should be clubbed in groups or if the group should be mixed. In some cases children who know more tend to interrupt the younger children. In other cases those who know more assist others. It really depends upon each group and the teacher's rapport with the children. The main thing is to do activities in small groups and not in a whole class of 40.

We like to keep the learning part restricted to about 90 minutes. Sometimes kids want to do more and more.

Each child is told to do something more at home. However, no one actually checks if homework is done. We find that children often do more than they are asked or do something completely different that they like. It is not discouraged. In fact no effort of the child is to be discouraged.

The project: Read India

The technique was not innovated in one place with one set of children. Delhi, Patna, Maharashtra cities, Gujarat regions all had a part in it. As we sensed that we had a magic wand, we HAD to see if the magic worked on a mass scale. Given our long collaborative relations with governments we also sensed the possibility of transferring the technique to government systems.

It was our experience that at least 50% children in grades III and IV of government schools cannot read. The common man of India says, “children go to school but they cannot read”.

It appeared that if all governments could be persuaded to adopt the method, we could have all Indian children reading. This seemed especially possible since the Government of India has launched the “Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan” (EFA Mission/ Movement) to ensure universal elementary education by 2010.

In January 2003, the Read India Campaign was thought of in a broad sort of way. Specific planning and budgeting was difficult. It had to be a campaign riding on the “magical” technique to get children reading in a short time.

As in case of the technique to learn to read, we abandoned sequential planning in favor of throwing open the technique to anyone who cared to take it and run. But, there were some basic strategic goals to be achieved before we generated true confidence and enthusiasm for the technique.

- ✓ First, all Pratham groups across the country had to feel comfortable with the technique and the evidence of that comfort would be in results.
- ✓ Second, the replication in the Pratham programs would be used as mass scale demonstrations to show large numbers of children moving from being non-readers to readers. Creating excitement among parents, administrators, opinion-makers, and policy-makers would be critical for building momentum and mass scale success.
- ✓ Third, once different Pratham units had mastered the art of transferring the technique to even the poorly skilled instructors from slums and villages they would begin to transfer the know-how to school systems and NGOs or any other conceivable group that would want to contribute to solving a national problem.
- ✓ Fourth, as the children learned to read, they would have to be given books. There is a paucity of children’s books in Indian languages. Good books are just not there. Pratham would initiate and promote new quality

books for the children in a big way starting with all Pratham projects as a primary market. In India, a publisher considers an order of 2,000 copies a very good order.

- ✓ Fifth, setting up libraries for children would be the best way to ensure that children get many books to read.
- ✓ Sixth, develop the next stage after the current 'learning to read' and move into the 'reading to learn' phase using new books, textbooks and writing exercises. The same with numeracy and maths problems.

In addition to the above, we included a major element of 'social audit' at every class, every community, every school where the reading technique was being used. This had dual use. First, we could ensure that our own people did not get carried away and report false results under pressure. Secondly, having other people witness the change would be a strong advocacy tool, which would lead to larger ownership of the program. In fact, we encouraged open testing of children in front of parents and other community people to make the change visible. We feel that once the community sees the magical change in such a short time, they will not accept a child not learning to read after spending 4 years in a school. Raising the standard of expectation, where none exists, could introduce an element of accountability of the school system.

This idea of social audit has certainly helped. There are many people in each community who have witnessed the progress. We are going to use this element while we scale up the program further, especially in villages where Village Education Committees are expected to assist and monitor schools.

Over the last six months, Pratham has made strides in all of the above strategic areas. Phase I has been completed with remarkable success with over 150,000 children benefiting.

Read India: Implementation- Impact

Total coverage in Jan-Jun 2003

Jan-Mar (Pratham programs, India-wide)	89,000 children
Jan-Mar (Government of Maharashtra Pilot)	20,000 children
Apr-Jun (Summer camps- India-wide)	46,500 children
Total coverage in 6 months	155,500 children

Cost:

In principle, the cost of getting a child to read is the cost incurred over two months including the instructor's salary (Rs. 25 per child) and the teaching learning material (Rs. 10 per child). Since the community provides space free of cost, that expense is eliminated. Adding costs of training,, supervision, evaluation, and administration, the cost cannot go beyond Rs. 50 per child/month. Bottom line: Rs. 100 to get a child to learn to read.

In fact, when school teachers take up the program, the cost drops to Rs. 10 per child or less.

Transferring the know-how to all Pratham units:

By mid-January the technique was better understood. There were only two months till the end of the academic year and closure of Pratham programs for the year.

The process of transferring know-how within the Pratham system started in late January.

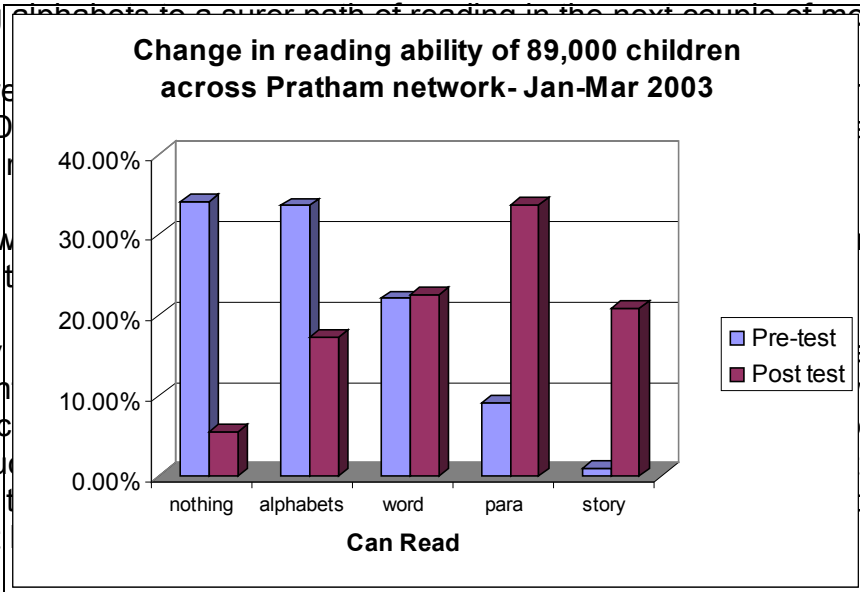
Notes describing the procedure were created and distributed to key people. Leading Pratham persons held one day workshops and meetings to explain the key and simple points. Often problems were solved on cell phone conversations.

There was never a training program for instructors that lasted more than a few hours. Goals were clear, do's and don'ts were explained. People were encouraged to observe and improvise as long as they ALLOWED CHILDREN TO LEARN.

It was a massive exercise, a cultural shift for most people. Changing from a teacher-centric approach to a child centric approach. Moving from open ended teaching-learning to time-bound result oriented teaching learning. The two key elements seemed to be in contradiction with each other. But, those who got it, came back full of enthusiasm, and those who didn't were told to let go of old concepts and try again.

Results from all Pratham units came back in April. There was region-wise unevenness in achievement. Much of it was primarily due to difficulty in transmitting and absorbing the key element of the technique- “DO NOT TEACH.. LET THEM LEARN” and in also understanding exactly how to let them learn. Yet, the number of children not knowing even alphabets dropped from 33% to 5.6%. The combined number of children who could read stories or paragraphs jumped from 10% to 54.5%. Most importantly, every Pratham person, including the grassroots instructor exuded confidence. We can do it!

In the Pratham classes, in less than two months, over 40,000 children learnt to read at least simple paragraphs and over 28,000 children moved from not knowing alphabets to a surer path of reading in the next couple of months.



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The summer vacations, when schools are closed, offer an opportunity to bring large numbers of children together to learn. In the past, such classes have been held in Delhi, Lucknow and Jaipur. This year, the idea spread to different projects in North and Western India. The goal was to teach children to read before schools reopened. During summer vacations, most Pratham programs conducted the Read India campaign programs of 4-6 weeks at different locations.

Below, we give interim data we have obtained from different centers. The tables below only show results of those children who took both, the pre-test and the post-test.

In Ahmedabad, a purely volunteer-based (professionals, students, NGO activists) program was organized. Nearly 6000 children went through the program with over 55% ending up in the reading category. The summer camp actually lasted only 3 weeks but showed tremendous progress.

AHMEDABAD SUMMER CAMPS: APRIL-MAY 2003				
	Pre Test		Post Test	
	Number	%	Number	%
Story	291	4.7	1951	33.5
Para	542	8.8	1302	22.4
Word	1055	17.1	1204	20.7
Letter	1827	29.6	1074	18.5
Nothing	2467	39.9	288	4.9
Total	6182	100.0	5819	100.0

Duration of Ahmedabad Summer camps: 3 weeks of teaching

In Rajasthan, summer programs were organized in Jaipur, Jodhpur, and Kishangarh. Following are results only from the mid-test held after four weeks. The Lucknow and Allahabad summer camps ran 6-8 weeks.

Language: Hindi

SUMMER CAMPS IN RAJASTHAN : MAY-JUNE 2003

	Pre Test		Mid test	
	Number	%	Number	%
Para	708	11.2	2413	40.0
Word	1476	23.3	1640	27.0
Letter	1544	24.4	1391	23.0
Nothing	2610	41.2	652	10.0
Total	6338	100.0	6096	100.0

Duration of Rajasthan summer camps:
Rajasthan numbers include: 2739 children in Jaipur

Lukcnow and Allahabad: May-June 2003

	Pre-test		Post test	
	Number	%	Number	%
Story	177	3%	1996	33%
Para	776	13%	1092	18%
Word	921	15%	1349	22%
Letter	1857	31%	1297	21%
Nothing	2341	39%	337	6%

BANGALORE SUMMER CAMPS: APRIL-JUNE 2003

	Pre Test		Post Test	
	Number	%	Number	%
Sentence	522	8.0	3515	54.1
Word	2420	37.3	2405	37.0
Letter	1810	27.9	448	6.9
Nothing	1741	26.8	125	1.9
Total	6493	100.0	6493	100.0

In Delhi, summer camps showed about 20,000 children attending over the 6 weeks. Many children walked in and out of the camp, which was open to neighborhood children. Vacation plans interfered with the camp activity (or, was it the other way round?) only about 15,000 children took both the tests. The results are shown below.

SUMMER CAMPS IN DELHI : MAY-JUNE 2003

	Pre Test		Post Test	
	Number	%	Number	%
Story	2212	14.9	8111	54.7
Para	2363	15.9	2235	15.1
Word	2333	15.7	2375	16.0
Letter	3081	20.8	1727	11.6
Nothing	4852	32.7	393	2.6
Total	14841	100.0	14841	100.0

Duration of Delhi summer camps: 6 weeks

In Patna, the summer camp lasted for just three weeks and results left something to be desired.

Language: Hindi

PATNA SUMMER CAMPS: JUNE 2003				
	Pre Test		Post Test	
	Number	%	Number	%
Story	112	8.3	485	33.9
Para	85	6.3	149	10.4
Word	273	20.3	254	17.8
Letter	393	29.2	345	24.1
Nothing	485	36	196	13.7
Total	1348	100	1429	100

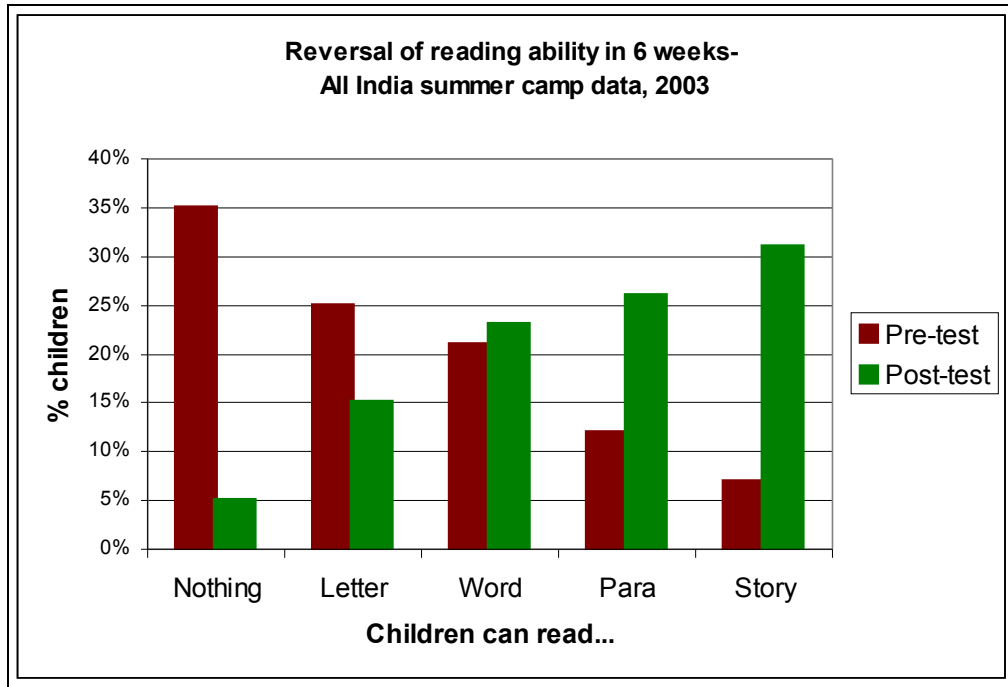
All India summer camps				
	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Number	%	Number	%
Story	2792	7%	12543	31%
Para	4996	12%	10706	26%
Word	8478	21%	9227	23%
Letter	10512	25%	6282	15%
Nothing	14496	35%	1991	5%
Total	41274	100%	40749	100%

Durations varying between 3-6 weeks
 Numbers of children who have taken both tests only
 In Banmgalore and Rajasthan, story and para readers not separate.

PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN IN SUMMER CAMPS: BY CITY AND DURATION

STATE	CITY	Number of children who took baseline test	Duration of camp: starting date, ending date	Number of actual working days during summer camp period
DELHI	DELHI	19232	May 12 - June 21	~ 35 days
UTTAR PRADESH	NOIDA	359	May 2 - July 3	~ 45 days
	ALLAHABAD	2308	May 12 - June 21	~ 35 days
	LUCKNOW	4365	May 14 - June 26	~ 35 days
RAJASTHAN	JAIPUR JODHPUR KISHANGARH	2739 2227 1154	Rajasthan figures are mid test	
BIHAR	PATNA	1348	June 1- June 21	~ 18 days
KARNATAKA	BANGALORE	6493	April 16 - June 4	~ 40 days
GUJARAT	AHMEDABAD	6182	May 1 - June 13	~ 21 days
	TOTAL	46407		

Source: Pratham Resource Centre: Research and Assessment Unit. July 2003.



The children involved in the summer camps are both, in-school and out of school. It is noticed that among in-school children and older children, even if they have no knowledge of the alphabets, learning is much more rapid and they tend to move all the way to fluent reading much faster.

A note about Urdu:

Replication of success in all Indian languages excepting Urdu was not surprising. Urdu follows the Arabic script. Hence, we were not sure how the method could be used. We started by converting the alphabets to their phonetic equivalent. A young girl, Mallika Shaikh, leading the Aurangabad program built further on this and we saw success in rapid learning. A detailed note on the method has not been prepared.

Unexpected benefits of the rapid learning:

Pratham has been serving working children and also children in conflict with the law who are in 'observation homes' or 'remand homes'. The time available to teach such children is often very short. In the remand homes, the children come for two to three weeks. The rapid learning technique came as an unexpected bonus to these projects and children started reading in a very short time. The government is interested in Pratham taking the program to all remand homes in Maharashtra.

Similar progress has been seen with working children although we need to strengthen that area of work with further support to address their specific needs.

Transferring know-how to the government school system:

Pratham has been working with various municipal government schools in Maharashtra. We picked three municipal bodies of Thane, Pimpri-Chinchwad, and Aurangabad to show a clear impact of the Read India program on children. Over, January-March, the children in grade III-IV were taught to read in these cities through community volunteers (Balsakhi-program).

The real test of the technique would lie in the hands of others where we had no direct control over discipline or motivation. It was important to see if we could transfer successfully the know-how to government school teachers.

We met with Government of India officials dealing with elementary education and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in mid-January. It was decided that the Read India program, use of the new technique, could be tried in the Janashala Program to improve status of education in selected districts and cities. The program is a Government of India and Joint UN mission initiative.

The Jaipur unit of Janashala expressed interest in replication. They had done some in-school work over the years. So, we discussed the technique with their resource persons and suggested that they take up the project on their own and we could assist when needed. The Jaipur Janashala program did take up a 'reading campaign' but for some reason it was limited to 10 days and we have no data indicating if the program was successful or not.

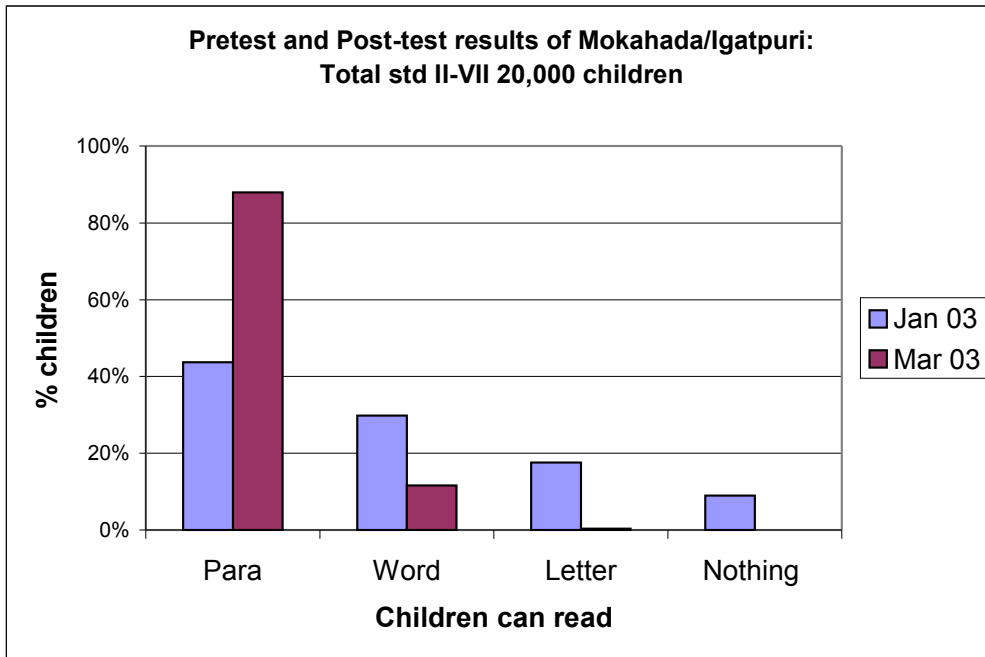
At the same time, the Janashala program in Maharashtra decided to pilot the project in two tribal blocks in two districts. This pilot was planned quickly but with a lot of clarity. Pratham provided two community leaders as resource persons who would go from village to village. Usha Rane, head of the Maharashtra Program and Director of Curriculum conducted training of Cluster Center Coordinators (who are responsible for the academic and administrative matters in about 15 schools in as many surrounding villages). These coordinators were urged to assess their own classes first. Soon after, they were trained to use the technique while they trained the other teachers to conduct assessment. So, by the time the teachers were ready with their assessment results the coordinators and Pratham resource persons were ready to train them.

In addition to the training program, external evaluation was an important element introduced in the program. We suggested that the local teacher training college could be assigned this job based on assessment tools and methods agreed upon by all three parties. This is possibly the first time anywhere in India that mass scale external assessment to validate reports of government school system has been allowed.

In the first round, the teachers returned a much higher number of children who could read (nearly 73%), which did not at all match with the sample testing by the external agency (44% reading). The external agency had randomly selected 10% children in 20% schools. The teachers went back feeling a bit sheepish and when the new results were put together from nearly 160 schools, the match was almost perfect - 43% children reading (teachers' assessment) and 44% children reading (external agency's assessment).

The results of the experiment are also recorded on video with testimonials from teachers who were uniformly enthused and many wanted to spread the gospel in other parts of the district and the state!

The numbers show a startling jump, verified by external sample testing. A video documentation of some children is even more startling. Clearly we had moved well ahead of our experience in Delhi and the technique worked much better in schools. In this pilot the children had 45 days (instead of the 21 days in the Delhi experiment).



The budgeted cost for the program was barely Rs. 2 per child for the teaching learning material! Pratham did not charge the government for any of the expenses incurred except for the teaching learning materials provided as per the budget.

This was the best clearly visible model of catalytic impact Pratham has been able to develop so far.

As a consequence, the Government of Maharashtra has prepared a scheme to get every child in grade III and IV proficient in 3Rs. This will impact over 4 million children in all rural government schools and small town (class 'C' municipalities) government schools.

The State Project Director of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in Assam invited Pratham to talk to his team in early January. Rukmini Banerji, head of the North India Pratham group discussed the project with them and later community leaders from Delhi were flown to Guwahati to conduct training. The project is being tried out in Urban Assam as a starting point with only marginal involvement of Pratham.

The Nagpur Municipal Corporation, a large city self-government body, has taken up the program on its own steam since June 2003. Pratham has conducted training and the school teachers have started working. We may not have a direct role but we hope to monitor the progress.

The 2002-03, Pratham workers had trained 600+ municipal school teachers in Mumbai to work with Std I children. They schools did not return any data but the Education Officer has requested that Pratham should train Std II and Std I teachers this year. The municipal authorities for some reason do not want to take up reading in higher classes. Interestingly, the school teachers who had seen the progress of children in slum communities last year have asked to be trained to use the technique. We expect this demand to grow.

There are several examples where the teachers or local officers are not waiting for central administrative approval to participate in Read India.

When the result is visible, and desirable, people take their own initiative with confidence.

The Gujrat government has appointed Pratham Gujrat as resource persons to work with them on planning for the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

The Delhi government has extended an invitation to Pratham Delhi to activate libraries in all schools. It is quite likely that Pratham will be able to find a way to impact the Delhi school system in a big way following the success of the summer program in which over 25,000 children participated.

At the time of this writing, almost one district administration is adopting the program every day in Maharashtra.

Impacting opinion-makers and policy-makers: turning targets of advocacy into advocates, and larger community participation for sustainability.

Pratham was conceived as a tripartite partnership between people, corporates, and government. Traditionally, we had not attempted to work with important people in the areas of art, books, theater, newspapers, and politics. None of these are relevant to the day to day project-work that we have to do to deliver education as per proposals submitted to the various donors.

The innovation in reading has suddenly changed that.

There is an urgency in reaching the last non-reading child in India. If all it takes to get the child reading is 4-6 weeks, then it is criminal to delay reaching that child by months and years. Hence, we decided to use the best advocacy tool we have to influence opinion:

Let them SEE the change in the child by themselves.

Starting late February, top film personalities of India were invited to observe the children and become advocates of Read India. This suddenly attracted media attention, but the message about the magical change was lost somewhere in the glamour.

In Maharashtra, through another process, the Finance Minister, Mr. Jayant Patil, expressed interest in trying the program out in his constituency. All expenses would be borne by his supporters and Pratham would provide only two paid resource persons. The same has been done in the constituency of the former Chief Minister of Maharashtra and former Defence Minister of India, Mr. Sharad Pawar.

In Rajasthan, the project was replicated in the constituency (Jodhpur) of the Chief Minister with his concurrence. We hope that this will result in a wider initiative in Rajasthan where several major programs are being conducted with bilateral assistance.

Pratham is approaching various such personalities with the offer that if they point to a part of the city or a group of villages, Pratham will show that the percentage of readers will jump from the existing about 50% or less to about 80% or more, and the numbers of children who cannot even read words will drop to near zero in about 6-8 weeks, allowing 15 days to prepare in a new location.

Creating guarantees of sustainability through NGO and people's participation:

The Pratham network has been predominantly city-based barring exceptions of Kutchch, three rural blocks of Maharashtra, and a few blocks in Andhra Pradesh. We have succeeded in involving parents and local organizations in supporting the work in slums to some extent. However, it was difficult to involve the community in regular activities too much beyond providing space free of cost and providing other assistance from time to time.

In the Read India program, 'social audit' by local people/ businessmen, professionals/ teachers has been an important element of the design. This element is being strengthened and enhanced with every program.

In Maharashtra, the scaling up in Mokhada and Igatpuri blocks through school systems did not leave much time to work on direct involvement of parents and other villagers since we were much more focused on transferring the know-how to teachers and creating guarantee of good results.

Swapnabhoomi is an NGO in Parbhani district of Maharashtra. We have interacted several times before to take the issue of fundamental right to education forward. They have strong community links through youth in almost 90 villages. So, we asked if they would like to experiment with the technique in the villages without involving the school teachers. The experiment was designed to have community volunteers work with children. The villagers would test the children in the open during the pre-test, and then again at the post-test.

Swapnabhoomi was assisted by two community leaders from Pratham. After initial teething troubles, the program took off and there are good results. Most importantly, we now have the possibility of combining state-led school initiative with initiative from the people.

In fact, in the constituencies of the political leaders we notice that there is considerable enthusiasm from their followers to participate and this is in turn working to make the system more accountable. The main thing that the community people observe after the post test is, "these children did not learn to read for all these years, and that changed in just one month!".

We believe that this feeling is the first step towards creating a standard expected of the local school. It will be difficult for the school to justify a child not being able to read or do maths after spending four years in school.

The Read India project cannot be terminated. The nature of the project is such that we must continue with more innovations and spread the work to all government schools in India.

Future plans:

Spreading the program India-wide

The Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development officials of the Education Department have taken note of the events in Maharashtra. Can the innovation be spread to other states under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan scheme funded by the Government of India ? SSA has been designed to allow the states to take planning initiative and the Union Government is reluctant to force any program on the states. However, it may become possible to expose other governments to the new technique so that they may take it up in their states. We expect that other governments will start following the state of Maharashtra by the end of the current year.

In Maharashtra, Pratham has created a team of 80 men and women who will work with district administrations in teams of two to ensure that the experience of the pilot is replicated. This assistance is necessary so that the initiative does not flounder or does not deviate from the simplicity of technique and transparency of achievement. Pratham is bearing the cost of this workforce in order to maintain independence and to avoid any allegations of vested interest (as is common in India).

In the Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Gujrat similar teams are being readied to respond to opportunities of spreading the program to other regions. Some Indians living abroad have expressed a desire to fund initiatives in villages surrounding their native place. In Uttar Pradesh three such initiatives are taking off. Some corporates too are coming forward to support larger initiatives elsewhere.

In Rajasthan, the Catholic Relief Services was offered assistance in their program with child laborers with good results. Other NGOs too are expressing interest and Pratham is holding workshops for them at various locations.

Thus, through a mix of initiatives from governments, donors, NGOs and individuals, we see the Read India program spreading across the country over the next year or two.

While it may be relatively easy to transfer the technique to schools, will it have impact on out-of-school children? We feel that wide dissemination of the technique will also help in spreading it to smaller NGOs working on non-formal education classes in villages and cities. It is well-known that results from these NFE classes are not terribly good except when they are run by NGOs with considerable technical resources. It may become possible to raise the levels of

learning in all NFE classes, although the transfer will be a bit difficult given their diffused existence.

We believe, through due to our experience, that if schools show good achievement, it will help in persuading out of school children to enter schools.

The next step of Read India: Reading to Learn, Libraries, and Books

The success in imparting 'reading' skills led to many other questions. Will the children retain these skills? Do they comprehend what they read? Can the school system be left alone to build the achievement levels further?

Naturally, 'learning to read' has to be followed by 'reading to learn'. Also, children need a constant supply of books. This will help in retaining, if not enhancing their reading skills. Hence, Pratham has started experimenting with the 'reading to learn' phase in different regions. The principle being followed here again is to develop know-how that is simple to replicate so that schools across India can absorb it without much problem.

One suggestion that is likely to be acceptable to the governments is to set aside one hour every day (or may be every alternate day) to reading and writing by one-self. This will focus attention on these basic skills and ensure retention, if not enhancement of the skills.

Pratham units in different locations have contacted publishers small and large to check out the kinds of books that are available in the market. We had a pretty good idea of the situation, but the following points are now confirmed:

1. Good books for children are difficult to find in Indian languages.
2. All small and large titles put together, in a given Indian language, not more than 1,000 titles can be put together. Out of these barely 200 are 'good' quality (but expensive).
3. It is difficult to find a retail book-seller in a city.
4. Publishers will tell you that if they get an order of about 1,000 books, they are happy. This, in a country of a billion people.
5. Children's books are mostly fiction. Non-fiction, information oriented books are very few and poorly published.

Should these findings surprise us? It's a comment on how neglected the children in this country are!

How much does it cost to print a 30 page, good quality four color books with lots of rich illustrations? By any calculation, the cost of a good sized book cannot go beyond Rs. 20 provided the orders are large. In fact, it is possible to sell these books for Rs.13-15 if the volumes of orders exceed a mere 10,000 copies.

Thus, the Pratham network has now formed an in-house publishing unit called "Read India Books". Over a period, it is likely to be a self-supporting unit that may be spun off as an independent entity.

This unit will publish about 50 books in collaboration with various other groups to set a standard in quality and price for children's books.

It will be our endeavor to provide good quality books under Rs. 20 for children and also to create distribution channels that will make books more accessible.

Thus, all children in Pratham's direct education-delivery program will read about 50 good books in a year. This will be a huge improvement.

In addition, we are setting up community libraries, which will have a dual task:

1. providing books to ALL children in its command area (1 library of for about 250 households. The 'library' will have about one book per child). The plan is to set up nearly 3,000 such libraries covering about 900,000 children.
2. ensuring that every 'member' of the library (hence ALL children in the community of 250 houses) learns to read and comprehend. Early experience in many areas shows that about 50% children (actually, their parents) are willing to pay Rs. 10 as annual or semi-annual fees. This can pay for the books to a great extent and it can also create possibilities of partial sustenance through local resources for a long time.

The Incubator revisited:

In the last year or so we had visualized the setting up of an incubator for individuals and organizations to enable them to take up Pratham-like programs. The Pratham Resource Center, funded by NOVIB- Netherlands, in a way, operates like an incubator. It helps different Pratham units by introducing new ideas, techniques, and programs. The units themselves participate in experimenting and enriching ideas.

Today, spreading the Read India program is dependent heavily upon teams of two persons working with district administrations and city administrations. Identifying such persons within Pratham and in other organizations, building their capacities, and giving them the necessary resource support to work with NGOs and governments is very important.

The need for an incubating institution, which will spread the Read India program, innovate next steps and transfer them to various end users, is much more pressing today.

Conclusion:

Read India could be treated as a project that began in January 2003 those pilot phase concluded at the end of June 2003. But, it is more of a movement evolving continuously with replication or scaling up built into its design.

In the ten years of Pratham, we have aspired to catalyze nation-wide processes through building models of delivering education to the deprived of India. The past models of the balwadi, balsakhi and bridge course were good models of delivery. However, the innovations in rapid learning to read and to do maths are qualitatively different. These innovations have changed the way we think about our role in the transformation of India's education scenario.

It is but natural to ask if a month long intervention will make a permanent difference in the education of the child. First, the child will have a better survival rate since she/ he can understand the class better. In a school environment, where books and written words are constantly used, it is more than likely that the skills will be retained. But, perhaps most important transformation may be in terms of teachers' motivation and enthusiasm to bring about change.

There is a poem, said to be Chinese in its origin. It serves as a guiding light for Pratham.

Go to the people
Love them
Learn from them
Start with what they know
Build on what they have
And when it is done
They will say
We did it.