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## Quality of School Education in Bhutan

*Case Studies in the Perspective of Gross National Happiness and Assessment Practices*

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# Quality of School Education in Bhutan

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*Edited by Nandu Giri and Kurt Dauer Keller*



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***- Case Studies in the Perspective of Gross National  
Happiness and Assessment Practices***

Edited by  
Nandu Giri and Kurt Dauer Keller

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

BCSE – Bhutan certificate for secondary education examination

CA – continuous assessment

CDEO – chief district education officer

CFA – continuous formative assessment

CSA – continuous summative assessment

CW – classroom work

DEO – dzongkhag education officer

EMO – education monitoring officer

FA – formative assessment

GNH – gross national happiness

GNP – gross national product

HOD – head of department

HSS – higher secondary school

HW – homework

MoE – Ministry of Education

MSS – middle secondary school

NIE – National Institute of Education

PBL – problem-based learning

PMS – performance management system

SA – summative assessment

SUPW – socially useful productive work

VP – vice principal

WMVG – waste management volunteer groups

ZOPED – zone of proximal development

ZPD – zone of proximal development



## FOREWORD

This book is a product of a collaborative Bhutanese-Danish research project concerning the quality of school education in Bhutanese secondary schools. The empirical investigations that were at the center of the project took part in 2012-2014 and consisted in case study of seven selected schools, which was prepared through a small quantitative pilot study and followed up by a questionnaire with schools from most of the districts in the country. The present publication depicts the case studies and relates closely to our research report in four parts that were delivered to the funding bodies in 2015. References to these and other publications from our research project are found in appendix 13. A prominent part of the research project is Karma Utha's Ph.D. dissertation, which was also submitted in 2015, but after the research report and including additional contextual analyses related to the case studies. In the book at your hand the presentation of the case studies has been reorganized in order to make it more accessible to the international research community as well as the general public. The research project's theoretical approach has been specified so as to emphasize the relevance of our findings and interpretations to global debate and development of school educational quality. Aiming at the most readable publication we have also chosen to subject the quotations from our transcribed data documents to language correction. Appendix 11 contains a sample of the most radical changes that were made on the quotations. We would like this book to be useful for diving deeply into our procedures and results as well as for attaining a swift overview. So, a brief reading advice may be suitable.

Part I is an introduction that leads from presentation of our theoretical basis and empirical aims through sketching of the Bhutanese context of the case study schools to a summary of our empirical findings. Besides the included description in objective terms of the school context together with a short outline of ministerial documents and procedures related to the schools, contextual perspectives are found in part V that summarizes three interviews with educational

officers about the findings from our case studies and in appendix 12 in which a Danish boy describes his experience of a school day in a primary school (which was not included in the case study).

Part II through IV render the details of our findings within the three main themes studied. Each of the three parts is organized by way of statement of the results from our empirical analyses. The statement of a result is employed as the title of a chapter in which the empirical ground for that result is specified. Furthermore, part II, III and IV are introduced with a short presentation of our research-based, theoretical understanding of the pertinent theme, and ended with theoretical interpretation and discussion of the presented results from empirical analysis.

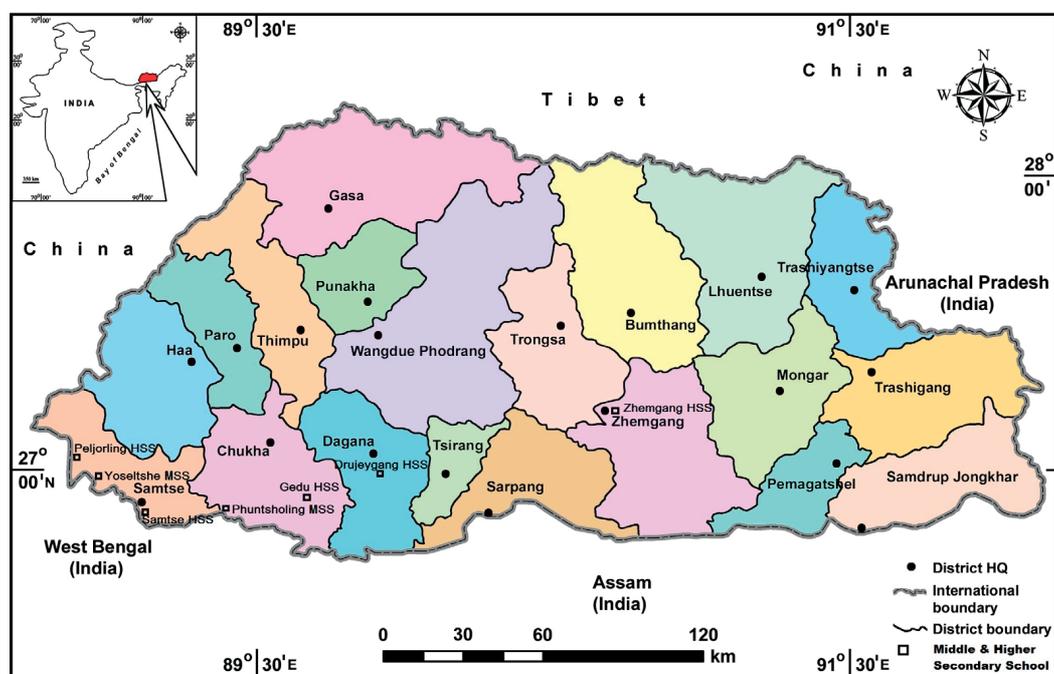
In part VI the methodology of our research project is outlined. Most of the appendices in part VIII are guides for the application of a method of qualitative research, differentiated also as to the groups of respondents. Appendix 10 serves to show an example of how a stated result from the formative assessment analysis of the transcribed data material was documented with an index of relevant references to the data material.

To our many quotations from the transcribed documents of the case studies are attached a form of reference that the reader may wonder about. It only serves internal project purposes, as the first digit indicates the pertinent school (case), the second and third indicates the single document, and the number after the hyphen shows the line number from where the quotation begins.

We are grateful to the Bhutanese government and to Danida of the Danish ministry of foreign affairs for substantial financial support to the collaborative research project. Furthermore we want to express our thanks to professor Per Lauvås of Høgskolen in Oslo for his critical review and constructive comments on an earlier version of the manuscript for this book.

*Nandu Giri & Kurt Dauer Keller,  
Editors and lead researchers of the Bhutanese team and the Danish team,  
respectively*

# PART I: INTRODUCTION



It is possible to discuss quality of school education in perspectives that make sense globally as well as in local settings. Being attentive to aspects of worldwide interest as well their regional particularity is not a simple matter. But the challenges involved do not necessitate the choice to focus on only one or the other. As Gadamer (1989) has pointed out, meaning and experience can be understood across historical distances or cultural gorges, namely through shared horizons of the different lifeworlds.

## 1. The school institution: Organization development in global-local perspective

Two small countries who have both – at different times within the latest half century – shown courage to move ahead and attempt their own ways of changing society through the regulation of school education, Bhutan and Denmark, display interesting examples of a

public governance that strives remarkably for the educational promotion of quality of life in the population. While this book focuses on Bhutan, let's start with a brief look upon 'the Danish example': Together with the other Scandinavian countries Denmark took part in the unfolding of the welfare state in the 1950's through the 1970's with which educational implementation of the historical European ideas of enlightenment and modernity reached a climax. This was not so much through any refinement of the modern notion of formation of personal authority and responsibility (that lean on the German concepts of *Bildung* and *Mündigkeit*), but much more the radical principles of equality and solidarity with which the school was now supposed to introduce the entire up-growing population to the modern version of ancient ideas of freedom and democracy that throughout the times had only been for the social elite in power. Surely, the rise of the welfare state was rooted in two democratic grass root movements that particularly in Denmark became highly influential during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the peasants' cooperative movement and the workers' trade union. Solidarity in the form of equality through social rights became a guiding principle of the welfare state, in addition to the principles of legal equality before the law and political equality associated with the formal rights of democratic participation. The social rights were essential to the very idea of welfare society and welfare state that was predominant in the Scandinavian countries (Esping-Andersen 1990; Marshall & Bottomore 1992). 'Welfare' became a concept that associated economic growth tightly with equal educational opportunities, leveling of social differences and even with a personal maturity that implied taking responsibility for the welfare of others. Through school education together with social and health policy the welfare state has promoted a society marked by equality and solidarity. Contemporary social research criticized that neither the school system nor the welfare state lived up to the declared visions, but it is hard to deny that a significant leveling of social differences and distances took place. Experience of equality and solidarity also formed a high level of mutual trust and tolerance in everyday life. Though the welfare state has been on retreat since the 1980's, these qualities have later been accentuated

as the explaining factor behind the 'Danish happiness' that is asserted in popular international comparisons.

The Danish example shows something globally interesting about quality of education, namely that this is about much more than pedagogics. It is about the organization and development of school life as an integrated part of the societal culture. Only in a cultural perspective can it become clear how the school essentially relates to a society's macro level of capability building as well as to micro level of daily experience and learning. The concept of *institution* captures this notion of a historically organized cultural perspective that organizes a great many phenomena with shared significances, values and orientations. Institutions are taken-for-granted structures of social meaning that include psychological as well as cultural dimensions of what we experience as established, reliable and transparent, be it a social manner, an organization or a worldview. Historical formations of the culture are present in the institutional structuring of emergent situations and processes in the social life. This is the fusion and tension of modernity and tradition, global and local, planned and emergent, economy and culture, which define what we tend to regard as reasonable (i.e. sensible, appropriate as well as legitimate).

Selznick (1992) has made it clear that below the coherent structures of formal arrangements and procedures, which we recognize as an organization, there is an institutional level of social life. This institution (or 'instituted organization') is a culturally 'bounded reality' that gives meaning and directions to the always occurring open situations and unpredictable events in the organization. For instance, the institution of a hospital is a comprehensive frame of shared meaning and experience, which differs profoundly from other institutions such as that of a school, and is always-already taken for granted whenever specific matters of the formal organization (a change in economic resources, a new technology or plan, etc.) is at issue. Through the institution, a changing, contingent and ambiguous 'here and now' is associated dynamically and flexibly with the much more fixed values and orientations of a cultural community. Institutions are never just goal-directed activities but also forms of communication

to attain shared understanding and mutual recognition: Routines of thinking and acting are formed within less distinct and more fleeting forms of shared cultural meaning such as ideals, myths and rituals. It has also been emphasized by Selznick (1996) that the deep structures and dynamics of the instituted organization may easily include levels of loosely coupled and even diverging outlooks and 'rationalities'. Nevertheless, the rationality of an institution has three pervading aspects or 'pillars', as it is pointed out by Scott (2001) in his highly approved book on institutions and organizations: a regulative, a normative and a cognitive form of social reason.

This distinction corresponds closely with the three different societal functions of a school institution that have been emphasized by Abrahamsson (1989) and others: selection, socialization and qualification. Essentially, the regulation of the school institution is composed of top-down practices where the input is laws and economical resources, and output is the selection of the students through summative evaluation and differentiation. Socialization is about the comprehensive normative, moral and emotional integration of the students in the existing society. Internationally this is, definitely, the least conceptualized and researched of the three functions of the school institution. Finally, qualification understood as a matter of cognitive knowledge and skills is often regarded as the 'main' societal function of the schools. So much stress is laid on qualification that it tends to be misconceived as the only function of the school institution and as somehow including all important issues of regulation and socialization. The distinction between selection, socialization and qualification in the school institution is essential to the conceptual approach of the present research project. The perspectives of cultural happiness and practical evaluation (to which the quality of teaching-learning is related) turn out to be marked by problematic weighting between the three different dimensions of institutional functioning.

One more clarification concerning our approach to the school institution must be made: We are leaning, first and foremost, on the French tradition from Merleau-Ponty (2010) to Bourdieu (1990) in which sociocultural experience is more in focus than is the case in the later North American attempts to adopt insights from this French

tradition (DiMaggio & Powell 1991). The understanding of institution as sociocultural experience means that for instance the educational teaching-learning practices of the schools are conceived as actually lived existence and habitus, not just elements of regulatory systems and plans (cf. Keller 2005, 2010). An important implication of this theoretical outlook is that we regard socio-technical regulation of the school institution (conceived as a system or field of political, economic and technological structures and functions) equally important but completely different from the daily practice and experience of the teachers and students that our study concentrates on. It is Bourdieu's merit (1981) to make it crystal clear that the regulation of an institution as a social field and the lived experience of it as a habitus (including the normative-emotional as well as the cognitive-discursive dimension) must fit closely together for the institution to work well, though the two sides consists of entirely different kinds of sociality and historicity, which means than one of them can never be reduced to or determined from the other.

## **2. The aim of the case studies**

This book is most importantly based on theoretical and empirical analyses of seven case studies that have been conducted within the Danish-Bhutanese research partnership project *Quality of school education in the perspective of gross national happiness and assessment practices in Bhutan*. We strive both to illuminate the role of school education for reproducing and developing society and also to highlight ways in which the quality of school-based teaching and learning can be improved through daily practices of constructive evaluation.

Our research project aims at combining global with local perspectives on organizational learning. This holds, not only when it comes to the subject matter researched upon. Combining global with local also put its mark on the research team's internal process. Based on long-time professional experience the four Danish research team members were highly experienced in the ways of social and educational research in international settings. The partnership was designed with the explicit target of research capacity building within the

newly established Bhutanese academic community. At the same time the research process, on an ongoing basis, was enlightened by insights provided by the four Bhutanese research team members highlighting practical and theoretical perspectives of crucial importance to a global conceptualization of the quality of school education.

The research project makes use of qualitative as well as quantitative methods. Seven school-based case studies constitute the center of the qualitative component which strives for an in-depth investigation of themes and issues of obvious relevance for the quality of learning and teaching in classrooms. Our qualitative investigation was followed by a broadly conceived quantitative survey study allowing us to estimate the exemplary significance and general relevance of our most important qualitative findings concerning student centered education (Giri et al., forthcoming).

Our investigation is designed to uncover how quality of education is related to cultural happiness and to constructive evaluation (formative assessment). With this aim in mind our empirical investigations of Bhutanese school life are supplemented by document analysis as well as theoretical studies of the concepts of formative assessment, quality of learning, and happiness as culturally contextualized phenomenon. Methodologically the research project is implemented through and committed to an interpretive approach that integrates – through a combination of phenomenology and reflexive sociology – the understanding of subjective experience and the explanation of objective circumstances.

The research process was divided in phases as follows: A small quantitative pilot study on assessment practices and their importance for quality of education in Bhutanese classrooms was carried out by the Bhutanese sub-team January 2012. Following this, Bhutanese project leader Nandu Giri and Ph.D. student Karma Utha met the Danish research team members at a methodological seminar in June, same year, placed in Aalborg, Denmark. Theoretical and methodological foundations for the case studies were established during a one week workshop for the entire Danish-Bhutanese research team, taking place in Samtse, Bhutan, September 2012. The Samtse workshop led to the specification of our three principal research themes:

formative assessment, quality of teaching-learning (conceived like the two sides of the same coin), and cultural happiness (formalized as gross national happiness, GNH). Guides for the different kinds of investigation were worked out, differentiated as to methods applied (e.g. classroom observation, interviewing, etc.) as well as to interviewee groups (e.g. students, teachers, parents). These guides are found in appendix 1-9. They indicate how the shared pre-understanding within the project group was concretized into the procedural framework for the empirical investigation.

Let us briefly outline how the three named research themes and their mutual linkages are basically understood in this project. Even though, generally speaking, issues related to the quality of teaching-learning are of vital importance for quality of education, it would be a theoretical mistake to see them as the only or even as the most important issues. As already indicated, a differentiation must be made between, on the one hand students' capacity to amass scholastic knowledge, on the other hand the formation of students' personal character as future responsible members of a local community and larger society. For the former, intellectual talents further supported by didactic measures – and thus, by implication, quality of teaching-learning – play a decisive role. When it comes to the latter, however, another developmental logic comes to the fore. The formation in students of such lasting attitudes and capabilities as will heavily influence their later, positive contributions to society, is much more dependent on the quality of informal relations and emotional ties in the social lives. These considerations clearly imbue the concept of culturally infused happiness with a vast foundational importance, since it frames the way in which school life socializes the students for the rest of their lives. At the same time, restrictions as far as available time and resources are concerned put constraints on our inquiry into happiness-related issues, formative assessment presenting itself as a much more concrete and assessable topic to deal with. Thus, even if our project design was originally targeted as giving more or less equal weight to the three major research themes, we have come much further investigating how quality of education relates to formative assessment in the Bhutanese schools than how it relates to

cultural happiness. Below we give a brief overview, one by one, of the three themes and their theoretical significance in the context of our research project.

**Quality of teaching-learning:** Our primary interest in this research area is on the learning side, more precisely on the students' personal experience as an all-important frame and platform for any learning that may take place. When viewed in the light of personal experience the unfolding learning processes creates links between the students' motivation and their learning potential. A teaching agenda based on these principles also has the capacity to establish fruitful links between the official educational policy in Bhutan of 'student-centered teaching' and Vygotsky's celebrated concept of 'the zone of proximal development'. In line with discussions presented above, the import of teaching and its impact on learning should be investigated not only in the school context but also with regard to the students' lives in general: Their community, social relations and view of the future, all of which influence the overall life quality of the students as well as their ability to take concrete responsibility for the learning.

**Culturally rooted happiness:** The relation between happiness as a lived reality and GNH as national-political ideology should be critically examined. Thus, the interplay between the micro level aspect of experiencing and conducting a good life and the macro level aspect of the school as an institution with civilizing mission is considered the most important area to be investigated. One important issue related to this research topic is the extent to which school practices have been affected by the official policy instituted in 2009 and demanding that teaching-learning be entwined with GNH. Apart from the formalized and measurable concept of GNH, our research efforts have also been targeted at a more person-centered meaning of 'happiness' – as wellbeing, character formation and enlightenment (*Bildung*), being able to cope with needs, and sharing with others a good life that promotes civilization: meaning aspects which include material and immaterial aspects, political as well as ethical dimensions, and seem to make sense locally as well as globally.

**Formative assessment:** In the Bhutanese educational context the very FA term is known to cover different meanings and practices,

which have to be clarified and disentangled. Whatever label is used, however, the practice of formative assessment in an internationally recognized sense can be carried out as questioning, feedback, and peer assessment or self-assessment. In our study, feedback is selected as the primary dimension-of-interest, questioning and self-/peer assessment being of secondary research concern. In addition, we want to look into the *genuinely* formative effects – learning-related and otherwise – of the assessment practices actually used.

Our case studies were designed to come to grips with how the quality of teaching-learning relations coheres with the topic of cultural happiness as well as with the topic of formative assessment. From early on in the collaborative research process, we perceived quality of education as a perspectival topic in which the cultural background and basis may be marked (to some extent even formed) by the aim to pursue the happiness of the population, whilst the practical foreground of institutional policy may in the same vein appreciate the learning values of formative assessment. As is apparent in our research report<sup>1</sup>, the actual analyzes of the collected empirical data were carried out in three sub-teams each with their focus on one of the three distinct themes. Still, it comes out in the results of our study in what ways the quality of teaching-learning relations cohere with whether happiness is implanted through the school life as well as with potentials of formative assessment. Due to these two perspectival overlaps among the three themes, the reader will find a few examples of issues and points being taken up from both sides of these overlaps.

Apart from the three main themes, several associated issues concerning Bhutan's educational system have relevance for our study. These include: teachers' professional self-esteem, formative assessment of teachers' practice (and appreciation of *their* zone of proximal development), economic and political conditions (including GNH as a political success criterion), claims about declined educational qual-

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1 See Giri, Keller & Willert 2015; Giri & Krogh 2015; Keller 2015; Utha, Gurung & Keller 2015.

ity, use of assistant teachers, communication with parents, and the differences between rural and urban areas.

### **3. Context of the case study schools<sup>2</sup>**

The schools implied as case studies in our research project are: Drugyegang HSS, Gedu HSS, Peljorling HSS, Phuntsholing MSS, Samtse HSS, Yoeseltse MSS, and Zhemgang HSS. HSS stands for Higher Secondary School having classes till XII and MSS stands for Middle Secondary School having classes till X.

All of the schools are located in the south of Bhutan and the areas<sup>3</sup> they are located in have populations of 2477 to 8740 inhabitants living in 16 to 22 villages with 512 to 1918 households. Typically two or three ethnic groups live in each area speaking each their own language. Main crops grown in south of Bhutan are maize, oranges, cardamom, ginger, paddy, buckwheat and barley. The climate consists of hot and humid summers and cold and dry winters. The areas are typically center for a number of educational institutions eg. primary schools, middle secondary schools, extended classrooms and non-formal educations centers.

Of the seven schools, three schools are situated in urban to semi-urban areas (Samtse HSS and Phuntsholing MSS, Gedu HSS) and the other four in rural areas. All the schools have different facilities as indoor and outdoor game facilities.

There are little differences in the resources of the schools in terms of access to a library, computer and science laboratory and internet connection. But even if the resources are there, the internet connection can quickly be a problem, as an example from Phuntsholing MSS show. The internet connection here is via Wi-Fi and when the internet package finishes during the month then teachers and students have to wait for the next month for the net connection to be reestablished.

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2 The information about geographical location, population statistics, ethnicity, crops grown and climatic conditions are all picked from the book *At the Heart of the Kingdom* (Bhutan Media Services, 2013).

3 Called gewog, which is a group of villages.

Another example of problems with internet connections was due to the schools placement in a remote spot. At Zhemgang HSS most of the students lacked exposure to facilities like internet and they did express a lot of dissatisfaction on the use of ICT facilities.

There are different challenges of being an urban or rural school. If the school is very remote (as Zhemgang HSS) it can be difficult to attract experience and qualified teachers and managers. If the school is urban it can face challenges like use of banned substances like drugs by the students. Samtse HSS and Phuntsholing MSS are for instance placed close to the Indian border where access to banned substances is easy.

It is possible to offer three streams of study for class XI to XII: Science, arts and commerce, but not all schools offer all three streams, as it depends on which streams the students opt for. Teachers have a teaching load of 14 to 22 lessons per week. The classrooms are in general spacious and well lit, but there are also examples of crowded and dimly lit classrooms, where the light and fans are not working (Yoeseltse MSS).

Getting to school can be an issue. Even relatively short distances like 5 or 10 kilometers can take hours to overcome, when the only means of transportation is walking. At all schools some of the students have to use up to one and a half hour walking to the school. Most schools also have a bus service to those students residing near road head. The bus service depends to some extent on local resources and in one example the parents and the school could not come to a consensus on budget for fueling with the result, that the bus is not running (Yoeseltse MSS). In another example various companies and agencies where the students' parents work provide transport facilities making it possible for the students to come from as far as 15 to 20 kilometers (Phuntsholing MSS) and in Gedu HSS the students can come from as far as 2 hours' drive because eight buses belonging to a project where most of the parents are working are employed for reaching and picking up the students from school. In other cases students must stay nearby the school with their local guardian or own their own, 24 hours during school week, only returning to their families at weekends. Two of the rural schools have boarding facili-

ties Zhemgang HSS and Drugyegang HSS were a substantial part of the students stay as boarder.

At secondary school all the teaching is done in English (except teaching in national language Dzongkha). It is therefore interesting that we got mixed impressions of the students' ability to express themselves in English. At two schools (Yoeseltse MSS and Zhemgang HSS) there seemed to be a language problem indicating a potential learning problem. The students had problem expressing their points in the class and during the interview and they preferred giving yes or no answer.

The parents of the majority of students (in the rural area schools) are from farming background and most of the students in the rural areas are expected to help with household chores, looking after the cattle and collecting firewood after the school hours or during week-ends. Often the students can't get much help from parents as the parents are illiterate and not able to help and even if they were literate, they still are not able to help their children studying in higher classes due to change in curriculum from the curriculum during their time of study.

The Bhutanese school has special activities related to Gross National Happiness eg. one minute of meditation before every lesson (Samtse HSS) or some of the following activities:

- Mind training as a part of educating for Gross National Happiness
- Ban on the use of plastics in any form to create awareness on ill effects of plastic usage.
- Sharing of meals on specific days of the week to create awareness on consuming healthy food, revive the culture of having meals together amongst family
- Best conservation award to promote love and care for nature
- Best Gross national Happiness personality award to encourage and develop children as socially responsible, academically competent, morally upright, ecologically literate and economically productive citizens

- Driglam Namzha session ones a week to teach basic Bhutanese etiquette

All the schools have a visions and missions. The visions focus on excellence, stimulating (lifelong) learning good quality of education and infusion of Gross National Happiness values and principles. The missions focus primarily on the school as an institution which delivers education of high quality and meaning producing academically competent, socially responsive, morally upright, culturally oriented, ecologically literate, economically productive and independent citizens.

The below mentioned chart gives an overview over the schools in terms of year of establishment, status as urban or rural, numbers of students and teachers and number of students in the classroom.

	Established as/upgraded to HSS	Urban or rural	Students total/boys/girls	Teachers/support staff	Students in class size
Samtse HSS	2006	Urban	588	38/14	24-27
YoeseltseMSS		Rural	947	40/17	28-36
Peljorling HSS	2013	Rural	1530/801/729	59/14	+40
Phuntsholing MSS		Urban	717/373/344	34/12	30-35
Gedu HSS	2009	Urban	959/457/502	54/13	
Zhemgang HSS	2001	Rural	356	23	
Drugyegang HSS	2012	Rural	505/245/260	32/9	

#### 4. The Ministry of Education

To get an idea of how assessment, quality of education and GNH is viewed from a governmental perspective, Karma Utha went through official documents primarily from the Ministry of Education (MoE) and did three interviews with officials at three different levels under

MoE. The text in this section is based on information from the documents.<sup>4</sup> The interviews took place after the case studies were implemented and analyzed. The outcome of these interviews is rendered in the brief part V of this book.

The three officials were a Chief District Education Officer (CDEO) from Samtse (District in the south of Bhutan), a Curriculum Officer from Department of Curriculum Research and Development and an Education Monitoring Officer (EMO) from MoE. In every district of Bhutan there is a CDEO, who will be responsible to develop and maintain the quality of the schools under the district. The development part has to do with providing the schools principals and teachers with the necessary support to be able to implement new directions from the ministry eg. through conducting workshops. They can also take initiative to provide other kind of support for the schools, if they detect some problems in the performance of the schools during monitoring. Twice a year the schools are visited by a CDEO and EMO to follow up on school performance on a number of quality parameters as part of a new performance management system (PMS). Some of the parameters are:

- Attendance of the teacher
- Attendance of the students and absenteeism
- Academic performance of the school
- Timetable and fulfilling the instruction hours
- Lesson planning

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4 The search for any relevant documents in Bhutan for this study was carried out early on in order to attain comprehension of the existing information. The focus was on policy guidelines, reports on annual education conference, and articles related to assessment. Several concerned offices and persons in Bhutan were contacted through telephone and where possible, visits were made personally. The process undertaken was more of a snowballing process with one person directing to another. Intensive online search was also made. Most of the related documents could be traced. However, from the 16 existing annual education conference reports, twelve were not available. A few policy guidelines and few articles were not available either. Furthermore, the guide book on assessment practices which the schools were supposed to follow was not available in the schools, though some teachers mentioned seeing it. However, a copy of it was available in the office of Education Monitoring and Support and Service Department.

Through the PMS the ministry is able to compare the different schools (using three score cards: academic learning score card, enabling practices score card and GNH score card) and on that basis high performing schools can be recognized and appreciated, best practice can be spread and schools with low performance can be provided with professional development workshops on for instance the topic of active learning pedagogy or classroom management skills. The CDEO also finds that the PMS is helping the schools to identify their weaknesses, so that the school can get support from the CDEOs or from the ministry. Some sees PMS as a ranking system, but that is a misconception.

At the MoE, education policy guidelines and instructions are developed. The policy guidelines and instructions are dealing with quality of education in a range of areas, among others:

- Shortage of teachers in rural and remote areas as well as in subjects like mathematics, science and history (Ministry of Education 2004 23. Education policy guidelines and instructions; Ministry of Education 2009 27. Education policy guidelines and instructions).
- Quality and development of curriculum based on Bhutanese syllabus and major curriculum reform for specific classes and subjects (Ministry of Education 2004 23. Education policy guidelines and instructions; Ministry of Education 2009 27. Education policy guidelines and instructions).
- Quality and development of examination rules (Ministry of Education 2005 24. Education policy guidelines and instructions)
- Quality and development of assessment rules concerning summative and formative assessment (Ministry of Education 2005 24. Education policy guidelines and instructions)
- Developmental initiatives to increase quality of education ((Ministry of Education 2009 27. Education policy guidelines and instructions)
- Development of school assessment tools as School Self-Assessment and Performance Management System (Ministry of Education 2011 29. Education policy guidelines and instructions)

The MoE also conducts an annual education conference which deals with different challenges of the quality of education eg. the difficulties of implementing continuous formative assessment in its true sense (10. Annual Education Conference, 2007). Furthermore the Ministry of Education produces national reports on the development of education also dealing with the challenges of the education system eg. in 2008 where strategies to improve access, enrollment and retention among other issues were on the agenda.

The ministry's work is supported by documents like guides to the teachers eg. about how to do continuous assessment (Curriculum and Professional Support Division 1999), syllabus' for different classes and different subject (Curriculum and Professional Support Division 2008, 2011) and reviews of problems with eg. continuous formative assessment practices and how to strengthen them (Curriculum and Professional Support Division 2006).

To support implementation of governmental strategies the ministry also conducts workshops. One example of this is the work with infusion of GNH in the schools, where the ministry has conducted GNH workshops primarily for principals, who were then supposed to carry the ideas on to the teachers of the schools.

## **5. Summary of our empirical findings**

These are the results of the empirical analyses of the qualitative case studies:

### **Educating for happiness (GNH)**

1. GNH policy in itself does not create happiness
2. It is a challenge to infuse GNH across all subjects
3. GNH philosophies have improved the physical environment and led to changes in behaviour
4. The complex process of educating for GNH is often regarded as a top-down approach
5. There are diverse feelings about meditation (mindfulness)

### **The quality of teaching-learning**

1. Classroom practice is teacher-centered, syllabus-driven and applying student-centered methods
2. Teachers describe (aspects of) their working conditions as impediments to optimal teaching-learning
3. Students may provide important guidelines with a view to improving teaching-learning
4. Stakeholders vary widely in their expressed value-based commitment to school life and educational policy

### **Formative assessment (FA) in the schools**

1. The notion of FA is marked by ambiguity
2. Some crucial methods of FA are poorly established
3. FA influences the quality of learning
4. Social relations and motivation are formative features of particular relevance to assessment
5. The topic of 'the formative' is associated with the modern system of education
6. FA requires time and resources that often seem to be unavailable

## **5.1 Educating for happiness (GNH)**

### **GNH policy in itself does not create happiness**

Educating for GNH is a program aiming at reforming education in order to create social cohesion and integration of the Bhutanese identity. This policy extends beyond formal education and highlights holistic education through the transmission and cultivation of social and cultural values. However, implementation seems to be a challenge. Attention to the concept of GNH is apparent as explicit references to GNH values, but less apparent as promotion of the students' well-being through positive learning climate and fruitful teacher-student relations. In addition, most parents seem to be content with the well-being of their children in schools, though they may find the school's attitude towards the children too loose.

**It is a challenge to infuse GNH across all subjects**

As an educational policy, GNH is often thought of as something that the teacher should infuse into the pupils. But teachers find it difficult to combine for instance maths with GNH. The situation is very different with subjects such as literature and history. A potential for progress seems to be associated with the fact that GNH is not only taught as a distinct topic, but also through exemplary practice, e.g. when the teacher acts as a role model, shows respect for the students, and allows them to interact openly in team work.

**GNH philosophies have improved physical environment and led to changes in behaviour**

There are many initiatives to infuse GNH values, for instance morning speeches, co-curricular activities, cultural events, and proper waste management. Parents, principals and teachers actually experience that the children have changed behaviour. For instance, some parents find that schools have conducted many good things within the issues of GNH. Also some of the students find that certain GNH practices have influenced in a good way.

**The complex process of educating for GNH is often regarded as a top-down approach**

A principal may not find it difficult to infuse GNH into the staff. But, apparently, most of the staff feels that the program of education for GNH is a top-down approach. They may be somewhat confused about it and they may not regard themselves as educated for practising it. That might be, for example, when the intention is that the school and community have joint initiatives or that teacher and students communicate informally.

**There are diverse feelings about meditation (mindfulness)**

Mediation is being practiced regularly in the classrooms. Generally, the meditation seems to have a certain positive effect on the students' abilities to concentrate and to learn. However, in the view of some students and teachers this preparation for mindfulness in the classroom is not always being taken seriously.

## **5.2 The quality of teaching-learning**

### **Classroom practice is teacher-centered, syllabus-driven and applying student-centered methods**

The overall impression is that the teaching is very much syllabus-driven and teacher-centered. This seems to be in contrast to the way the teachers themselves would prefer to teach. When asked, teachers commit themselves to student-centeredness. Also the students ask for more time to student-centered activities. Concerning the atmosphere in the class room the traditional strictness was not found during the classroom observations. In the interviews, however, strictness was a much debated issue, especially among students (who, generally speaking, preferred the non-strict teacher variety) and parents (who, generally speaking, found their children's teachers to be too lenient in the execution of their classroom manager role).

### **Teachers describe (aspects of) their working conditions as impediments to optimal teaching-learning**

In Bhutan, and in spite of Government initiatives to attract teachers by extra allowances, the teaching profession is not considered a priority field among job seekers. Hence, there is shortage of teachers in many schools in Bhutan. Other things being equal, teachers who experience their working conditions as professionally supportive are more likely to stay in their jobs than teachers feeling professionally hampered by their working conditions. For these reasons Bhutanese teachers' experience of their working conditions is an issue of national import.

### **Students may provide important guidelines with a view to improving teaching-learning**

Bhutan's brief school history has been marked by tensions between important pedagogical values; cf. our first topic where teacher-centeredness, syllabus-drivenness and student-centeredness were described as partly conflicting tendencies in classroom events. Historically speaking, educationalists, teachers and parents have been the most important discussion partners in shaping and changing nation-

al school policies and local classroom practices. Our study gave students a voice of their own. The messages sent by the students' voice are by no means completely unequivocal – but definitely worth listening to.

### **Stakeholders vary widely in their expressed value-based commitment to school life and educational policy**

Quality of classroom-based teaching-learning as observed in Bhutanese schools during 2012-13 is our main issue-of-concern in this thematic section. School life is unfolding and changing over time partly under influence of historically shaped educational policies. Citizens' value-based attitudes to school life function as enabling and limiting factors as far as educational policy-making is concerned; cf. the fate of NAPE (New Approach to Primary Education, 1985-93) the closing down of which was not, mainly, pedagogically motivated, but rather a consequence of stakeholder objections (parents and teachers). For these reasons value-based attitudes towards school life as expressed by stakeholder groups in our data material are worth listening to.

## **5.3 Formative assessment (FA) in the schools**

### **The notion of FA is marked by ambiguity**

Formative assessment appears to be a rather obscure notion in the Bhutanese schools, though the very denotation is well known. Formative and summative functions of assessment are often mixed so that supposedly formative forms of evaluation turn out to be used in a rather summative way. A frequent example of this is the misconception of continuous assessment as being the same as FA. Furthermore, the purpose of FA often seems to be of a managerial and administrative kind that might serve the school system rather than of a pedagogical kind that apt to serve first and foremost the learning processes.

### **Some crucial methods of FA are poorly established**

Considering the essential methods of FA – questioning, peer assessment, self-assessment, and feedback – these are in different ways

fairly neglected. This indicates a common preference for simple and accessible teaching techniques instead of a formative teaching style in which assessment is closely associated with stimulation of learning. The practices of the four methods seem to be more aimed at the teacher's maintenance of control than at providing useful advice that might relate closely to the students' own experience and thereby invite to reflection.

### **FA influences the quality of learning**

To the extent that FA is actually taking place, it appears to have a positive effect on learning. This is recognizable through the engagement and positive attitude with which students respond to comments that obviously serves to guide their further learning. It is also seen as collaborative learning activities in group work where the students help one another, and in dialogues between teacher and students where the open form of questions and answers promotes the students' own thinking. Similarly, in situations where teachers pays special attention to the needs of weak learners, FA offers itself as a method that starts from the perspective of these learners and relates to their particular process of development.

### **Social relations and motivation are formative features of particular relevance to assessment**

Learning seems to be promoted by FA through social relations and motivation. Teacher-student interaction presents itself as a field of communication and reflection that is stimulated recurrently by FA in the sense of informal evaluation. In this interactive field, learning can thrive from the better self-esteem of the student, from the responsibility that they take for their own learning, and from their own motivation driving the development process.

### **The topic of 'the formative' is associated with the modern system of education**

Some parents express a reserved attitude towards the formative approach to assessment practices in the school. To some extent, this relates to their own educational background, which does not give

much of a basis for appreciation of a notion of 'the formative' that seems to be associated with modern ideas of teaching and education. Generally speaking, these parents prefer the marks and the discipline of a strict school system, rather than informal evaluation and open, friendly relations between teachers and students. In contrast, most of the students and also many of the teachers tend to find friendly teacher-student relations and a good atmosphere in the class room of decisive importance. The secondary school students seem to be well aware of the long term implications that the formative practices of assessment are likely to have on their acquisition of knowledge and qualifications.

**FA requires time and resources that often seem to be unavailable**

The teachers' workload together with the constraints and the forms of support that they receive from the school administration tend to give priority to teaching formalities (associated with the syllabus) rather than the learning processes (that are predominantly informal). With a fixed curriculum and a heavy workload, quantitative indicators of teaching and learning always tend to be at the fore. Thus, care for the actual quality of learning – including the entire matter of FA – easily becomes a demanding extra load that is perceived as cumbersome and distracting. Rather than, for instance, letting students carry out self-assessment and peer assessment, teachers sometimes prefer to keep a maximum of control over the combined process of teaching and learning.

## PART II: EDUCATING FOR HAPPINESS



Bhutan's educational sector is a key institution for preservation and development of 'gross national happiness' (GNH). GNH is a development policy for Bhutan, consisting of four main aspects or 'pillars'. One of these, the preservation and promotion of cultural values, calls for particular attention in relation to educational policy. But in what sense can – or must – quality of education include cultural conditions of happiness? And in what ways are cultural conditions of happiness accessible through organizational learning, and therefore malleable for educational practices and reforms? In the particular perspective of public schools in Bhutan, our research interest is to understand quality of education as a global theme concerning the coherence between school life and sociocultural happiness. The present contribution to a global discussion is limited, however, to drawing attention to a conception of happiness, which is common to Bhutanese and Western outlooks and pertinent to the quality of education.

The traditional Buddhist concept of happiness that formed the Bhutanese notion of GNH is pointed out by Dorji:

*Happiness, in the context of GNH, has nothing to do with the fleeting senses like fun, pleasure, excitement (...), nor with the temporarily "happy" mood we feel when we get something we want. It is the deep and enduring sense of contentment. (...) Beyond the satisfaction of basic needs, external sources, particularly material sources, will not enhance happiness. (...) And it is also important to understand that seeking happiness within ourselves does not mean that we only care about our own happiness. It is a selfless pursuit, acknowledging that we cannot be happy if those around us are unhappy. (Dorji 2012, p. 18)*

Similarly, an ancient Western notion of happiness is ethical rather than aesthetic: It is not a matter of pleasure, but contemplation and practice of 'good life'. According to Aristotle, happiness adheres to practical wisdom (*phronesis*), which means that it is neither to be determined entirely nor quite arbitrary. Social and political circumstances are of major importance, as well as the virtues like courage, temperance, charity, justice, and kindness that define the character of an individual by its significant social relations. MacIntyre sums up how the books of Aristotle that are known as 'Ethics' and 'Politics' (relating to social relations as well as politics) thematize happiness:

*Both are concerned with the practical science of human happiness in which we study what happiness is, what activities it consists in, and how to become happy. The Ethics shows us what form and style of life are necessary to happiness, the Politics what particular form of constitution, what set of institutions, are necessary to make this form of life possible and to safeguard it. (MacIntyre 1996, p. 57)*

Common to the Bhutanese and the Western understanding of happiness are, thus, the appreciation of flourishing social relationships. Giving priority, time, and effort to social care and community has to do with political governance that establishes a framework of social and economic safety, equality and justice. It also has to do with

building new generations of persons with a social character that is marked by ethical awareness, authenticity and critical reflection so as to participate in the social life with responsibility and democratic attitude. From both sides, the political governance and the individual character, happiness can only be approximated and stimulated. Like love, friendship, and trust, the happiness can not be dictated or guaranteed.

The happiness of a population is, presumeably to a considerable degree, shaped with the cultivation of individual character through the school life. This character or 'attitude to life' is, strongly implanted through socialization, only weakly through qualification, and not at all – but on the contrary imposed as a fortunate or unfortunate destiny – through selection. In other words: the emotional attachment and the realization of values that are experienced in the school years are likely to be implanted as an affection that can sustain for a life time, whereas the decisive gift of contentment and well-being that comes with qualifications depends upon the opportunities for applying these qualifications in occupations and careers as an adult.

Socialization is the growing emotional attachment and appreciation of values, whereby students adopt a social character and associate with a cultural outlook. It forms a new generation's interpretation of the present society, including reproduction of traditions as well as visions of the future. The emotional processes of socialization as well as the cognitive acquisition of qualifications must concur with the regulative processes of selection that define the conditions for the young ones of integration and positioning in the society. Socialization and qualification can be subsumed under regulation, which means that the shared lifeform of a society is fragmented into differing, stratified life conditions.

Thus, as our theoretical point of departure, it seems reasonable to assert that the globally interesting notion of happiness, which is advocated with the GNH concept, is about a deep and enduring sense of contentment that thrives in social relationships. This happiness is 'cultural' in the sense that it is framed by institutions, by common character of individuals, and by principles of political government.

GNH is a policy for social and economic change in Bhutan. It has been operationalized into policy decisions and governmental actions. There is no single, all-embracing definition of GNH, but the following quote is widely used (Ura et al, 2012):

*Gross national Happiness (GNH) measures quality of a country in a more holistic way (than GNP) and believes that the beneficial development of human society takes place when material and spiritual development occurs side by side to complement and reinforce each other. (<http://www.educatingforgnh.com>)*

Nine domains are articulating the elements of GNH and form the basis of the so called GNH index. The first 2 domains are living standards (such as income, assets, housing), health and education. The next three cover use of time (and time poverty), good governance and ecological resilience. The last three are psychological wellbeing (which includes overall happiness, but also emotions and spirituality), community vitality and cultural diversity and resilience. The former Prime Minister of Bhutan argues that the infusion of GNH values in the educational system is a necessity, in order...

*...to address the greed, materialism, and consumerist fallacy that have turned us into mindless economic animals, and are destroying the planet, requires nothing less than a change of consciousness and hence of lifestyle. Education is the key. (Thinley 2009b:2).*

Infusion of GNH values in the school system is meant to counter threats as the ones enumerated in the quote. As an expression of this logic, the former Prime Minister called education “the glue that holds Bhutan together” (Ministry of Education, 2011:3). Educating for GNH is seen as a tool to bring about GNH and thereby also social integration. It is considered important for Bhutan that a national education strategy includes the cultivation and transmission of values (Ura 2009).

Many initiatives have been organised country-wide to promote 'Green School', which is understood as part of the GNH policy in relation to the school system. These initiatives have given rise to a collectively made pledge among school principals called "Green schools for Green Bhutan". The pledge implies an effort to develop and educate the Bhutanese children through the eight dimensions of Green school - Environmental greenery, Intellectual greenery, Academic greenery, Social greenery, Cultural greenery, Spiritual greenery, Aesthetic greenery and Moral greenery. It also promotes the active involvement of parents and community and helps them to nurture a 'brighter youth of tomorrow' (Bhutan Ministry of Education, 2012).

## **1. GNH philosophy has changed behaviour and improved physical ambience and social relationships**

In order for the GNH infusion project to become a success, schools and teachers have immensely important roles to play in infusing the concept of happiness. Therefore, even though the policy of Educating for GNH came into being as late as 2010 much work has already been done by principals, teachers and students to speed up implementation.

During our research visits to schools (in 2013-14) we registered many initiatives aimed at infusing GNH values – such as morning speeches, co-curricular activities, cultural events, proper waste management, to name a few. Morning speeches are not new in a Bhutanese school context – but it was interesting to note that teachers specifically commented upon, whether and in which way the contents of such speeches, made by student, touched upon those GNH values that are deemed important for children's proper development.

In some schools all classes regularly did GNH reflection, where students would share their general ideas on GNH issues and also describe whatever contributions they have made in their village, school or at a personal level.

During classroom teaching GNH seems not often to be separately discussed, rather it becomes merged with the specific content

taught during the lesson. However, as is made clear in a later section, the ease with which such 'mergers' are effected varies widely from one school subject to another.

At the physical level many local initiatives had been set in motion. On the walls in the class rooms and outside on walls and offices we saw GNH-related creations and quotations. A few exemplary interview quotes testify to this.

*To infuse GNH in school we have conducted cleaning campaign from X school to Y school. We also have cultural variety shows aimed the preservation and promotion of our culture. (306-17)*

*We have classroom decoration competition.....in our class we are keen not to use plastic for decorations. We don't use artificial stuff like sellotape or plastic. If you visit our class room, you'll find that all decorations are done with paper. Instead of glue from shops, we use homemade glue based on flour. (507-160)*

The aesthetic beauty of the school buildings and compound is valued. Some schools have created flower gardens and in the classrooms the aim has been to display the students' activities in presentable ways. Such initiatives have been promoted in the schools by the principals and the teachers by creating awareness of keeping schools and environments clean.

In line with the "Green School" campaign, students are not allowed to bring along junk food, and when eating they avoid the use of plastic materials. Among students GNH groups are established, - they name it WMVG (Waste Management Volunteer Group). When interviewed, students tell stories about mutual self-regulation within the group.

*...when we throw a small wrapper, a good friend who may be around will say "Don't throw – remember GNH" ...Whenever we hurt others they'll tell us we are not fulfilling GNH, somehow it helps us. (307-121)*

In a similar vein the following quote tells about a student who sees the introduction of GNH as having effected drastic changes in his social position and self-image.

*I used to do meditation seriously even before. In class it helped me concentrate more while the teacher teaches. After the introduction of GNH, I became the role model for my younger school mates. Before, I was really naughty. Now I do my work on time and I respect elders. At school I share my knowledge with those who need it. The same applies to my friends and to the community. (207-100)*

Our data material has many examples of parents, principals and teachers who actually have experienced manifest behavioural changes in school children. Parents often praise schools for having taken good initiatives within the GNH domain.

## **2. GNH policies in itself do not create happiness**

*Educating for GNH* is a program aimed at reforming education in order to create social cohesion and integration. Thus, education is seen as an important instrument for the creation of national unity and Bhutanese identity. In the education system GNH is expected to function as a safeguard against problematic aspect of the Western modernization that might be seen as threatening Bhutan. This conception of education as a tool to establish a “*distinctive Bhutanese identity*” is built on assumptions saying that maintenance of national unity and stability is essential for onward development, and that schooling can further such goals.

GNH supports the idea of a holistic educational approach, which may ensure that Bhutanese citizens gain a deep foundation in traditional knowledge, common values and skills. In addition to studying reading, writing, maths, science and technology, students are encouraged to engage in creative learning and expression. A holistic education extends beyond a conventional formal education framework

in order to reflect and respond more directly to the task of creating spiritually healthy human beings.

Implantation of these values is attempted by way of cultural preservation, building eco-consciousness, developing self-respect, being responsible and collaborative citizens, developing generosity, truthfulness, equality, dignity and personal well-being. But besides the promoting cultural and social values the school system also has to make sure that students develop subject relevant qualifications, literacy and knowledge.

The described ideology commands respect. Yet, not least taking into consideration that these ideas were not formulated until 2010, its practical implementation obviously presents challenges.

Some of the teachers, who meet the students on a daily basis, express feelings of insecurity when it comes to conveying, as part of their teaching practice, this ideology and its implied values in ways that match the visionary thinking of national leaders.

Many teachers pointing out to us that educational infusion of GNH is still in its initial phase. Some more time may be needed before its impact at classroom level becomes very visible.

*It is not that GNH concept as such is difficult, but as a first step we, the teachers need time before we are truly proficient in the philosophy of the concept...Before moving on to the children, the teachers themselves somehow need to be properly educated on GNH. (404-190)*

In that sense the project still 'belonged' most clearly to the top level of institutional hierarchies.

*I think it will take time for us to see the change, because it will be difficult to see the effect overnight. ... Also our children may not be aware of these kinds of values in the beginning. Even we, teachers who have till now only limited knowledge of the GNH concept, we also face lot of challenges in trying to inculcate such values in the children. ... But then, we have to be frank in describing the situation. As for me, I don't feel very*

*knowledgeable when it comes to GNH. In the beginning of this year, we got some 4-5 days workshop on GNH. ... GNH is a board topic. When the term GNH is used, I think of it as a Bhutanese idea that has become very famous. The concept was originated in our country, but we are still on the poor side in terms of its contents and how to apply it. It is pretty difficult, and it might take some time for us to come to terms with GNH values when relating to our students. Likewise they might also take some time to grasp it in their own day-to-day lives. (404-155)*

The data analyses presented below stem from classroom observation, and we exclusively focus on issues related to that one aspect of the GNH concept which deal with social and personal well-being. Our findings may be viewed as a generalized stocktaking of GNH climate in Bhutanese classrooms during the observation period, i.e. 2013-14. The one prevailing and recurrent conclusion emanating across singular observations was that well-being in class first and foremost depends on the relationship between teacher and students and the teachers' capacity to establish a positive learning climate and to show respect for the students.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the time during classroom observation, we registered a lively interaction among the students by themselves and between teachers and students.<sup>6</sup> In a like vein, we often observed students taking an active part in classroom discussions by asking questions and raising their doubts and questions to the teachers. In most of the observed classes a pleasant atmosphere seemed to prevail.

In other classes we saw minimal class participation and interaction. Teacher's apparent lack of interest in students and in promoting a learning oriented classroom atmosphere seemed to us the most important factor supporting this state of affairs. In some cases these teachers actually seemed not to notice the students very much. In

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5 Cf. documents 103-38,107-29,201-45, 503-28.

6 Cf. documents 301-26,501-28,503-28.

other cases teacher's way of organizing teaching and his/her personal style in approaching the students seemed to give rise to a competitive climate amongst one student group ('fast learners') – and, by implication, to reduce the participation of the so called 'slow learners' in class dialogues.

In our findings from interviews with parents, it is noticeable that parents were apt to express a general sense of gratitude as regards their children's school life, including (when asked) aspects related to Educating for GNH:

*We are very happy with the well-being of our children in school. I hear schools have initiated many good activities concerning issues of GNH. We would like to help the school in its efforts, but it could not work out. But as parents to school children we are really happy. (305-121)*

*I don't know much about GNH, but I feel it is good. (205-47)  
Bhutan government is providing us free education, so we are happy. (405-21)*

Yet, in addition to such generalized expressions of contentment, more of the parents in our sample told us they found school administration and teachers too loose compared to the past:

*I think concept of GNH is not doing well as there are not strict rules for the children and they are getting spoilt. (305-135)*

*I see a lot of students getting spoilt; this may be because they have freedom. (405-65)*

*Our time it was very different, we used to feel awkward to talk with anyone. Now we see boys and girls walk freely and openly. Are parents not taking care of such things? It could be parents' fault. (405-70)*

Some parents express that certain forms of corporal punishment might be a good idea, and there are those who find that students are being spoiled by too much freedom:

*We often hear in BBS that teacher never put hand on students; they cannot give any corporal punishment to the students... But deep inside I feel we should not compare our country with those developed and civilised country and use their ideas in our system. I feel there is a mismatch in the system. Even rules need to be revised, not like our time where teachers used to punch us and not entirely leaving the child to correct them but use some minor form of corporal punishment. (305-157)*

*Our time we really feared our teacher, we never looked at their face directly. But these days we observed, many children do not even stand when a teacher passes by. Why? Because they have no fear with the teachers. I feel if we have little fear in us, we try to be mindful of what we are doing. (305-168)*

Corporal punishment is banned in schools as a part of the GNH strategy.<sup>7</sup> However, some parents are apparently not quite aware of the contents of the GNH ideology, and some consider punishment of students and the consequent fear to be conducive to learning processes.

### **3. It is a challenge to infuse GNH across all subjects**

*Educating for GNH* requires from teachers in Bhutan that they succeed in integrating two very different teaching tasks: on the one hand the traditional task of discipline-based subject matter teaching; on the other hand the new task of teaching students to become happy per-

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<sup>7</sup> During 2012 the education ministry has been revisiting its way of handling disciplinary problems in schools in other ways than corporal punishment. For more information on this, see Sonam Pelden's article "Zero tolerance to indiscipline", 16 April 2012, Corpun, World Corporal Punishment Research.

sons and citizens. This latter task is to be implemented in basic accordance with GNH policies and philosophies.

Ideally speaking GNH-related issues must be present and permeate any and all activities in the school setting. From teachers we heard many stories about their dedicated efforts to match this ideal state-of-affairs. We also heard reflections on limitations that had to be acknowledged.

*...we are trying our best, but sometime we are confused also...  
We may feel we have a good understanding of GNH, in our heads so to speak, but when it comes to practice it is difficult.  
(502-127)*

*Yes I do infuse GNH values, but I must say that there are some topics where infusion is absent, like polynomials. (202-124)*

The following series of quotes gives more examples of ways in which teachers manage, or, conversely, find it hard to establish a fit between GNH-related values and attitudes and specific topics and teaching subjects. As may be expected, GNH infusion seems to work more smoothly in subjects within the liberal arts (e.g. languages) and social science realms (e.g. economics), whereas math and natural science put heavier demands on teachers' imagination. (202-129)

*It is definite that successful GNH infusion is partly a question of subject taught. Teachers teaching maths and science find it hard to include GNH in their subjects. ... Since I am a history teacher I can easily include GNH ideas in my teaching, and in ways that easily understood by the students. (306-144)*

*In language, especially when dealing with literature GNH works fine. Literature is a subject where GNH is always present. Moral issues, values... (504-184)*

*If I have to associate my today's lesson with GNH, it is directly linked to the fourth GNH pillar, i.e. good governance. (304-34)*

*When in math lessons I am, e.g., teaching addition and multiplication, if the students learn to handle the signs of minus (negative) and plus (positive) and to multiply correctly, I feel some sort of GNH values infusion is there – even if we do not identify the pillars. It is no easy task, but somehow or other, and aided by different school activities, we are actually infusing GNH in teaching and learning processes. (106-95)*

The following quote points at one way – which, however, demands time and resources for its implementation – of establishing ‘official’ links between particular teaching subjects and GNH-issues, namely by including such links in the textbooks used.

*You have in every chapter something on GNH, either in form of relevant information, or questions students have to answer. (112-102)*

Other teachers talked about GNH in a different discursive mode. Rather than discussing the concept in terms of relative fit/lack-of-fit between GNH and specific teaching contents they described happiness issues as a natural part of the teaching-learning processes that they facilitated in the classroom.

*The concept of GNH is not discussed separately. Rather it is merged with the specific content taught. ...Like when we are discussing the topic ‘electricity’, we will at some point include discussions about ways to conserve electricity. (204-32)*

*The concept of GNH is not taught separately rather it is infused in the content taught. Likewise I see myself as a classroom-based GNH practitioner when, e.g., I allow students to have open, informal interaction with me, the teacher, or when I show respect*

*for their ideas and thoughts, and when I show caring attitudes towards the students. I also make sure that the classroom is clean and hygienic and supportive of students' learning activities. (104-41)*

The latter quote shows the teacher as role model in terms of behaviour. A similar theme is touched upon in the following quote where the academic ethos is pointed at as a repository for GNH-like values.

*Normally in science we have been working with these values. Some values like integrity, honesty and team work, they may become transmitted to students through group work...They must learn to listen to whoever is speaking, to respect views of classmates, i.e. colleagues. (404-182)*

#### **4. Educating for GNH is a complex process and often regarded as a top-down approach**

As became evident above, marked differences existed among teachers with regard to their experiencing GNH as something foreign to their teacher's job, or rather as a natural ingredient in their classroom activities and their involvement with students. Within the latter category, some teachers would also profess that, to them, the demands put on them by *Education for GNH* did not represent something new, but was perfectly in line with what they had in fact been doing throughout their entire career as teachers. As such, one might say, they saw themselves as 'natural' bottom-up practitioners of the program requirements. For others, however, the program, in the present phase of its implementation, was definitely imbued with a strong, and also problematic top-down quality. The quote below is from a school principal.

*I have to be frank...it is not from bottom to top but it is from top to bottom. As an administrator I do find it difficult to incorporate GNH into the system – impose it on my teachers ... I acknowledge it as the noble vision of his majesty our king,*

*but I must admit that the translation of the various expectations that are implied by this noble vision into practical terms is definitely not an easy matter. (306-32)*

Some of those above-mentioned teachers who described themselves as long-time, 'natural' GNH-practitioners also voice the opinion that the essential or 'deep' qualities of personal happiness may become jeopardized when they become part of a governmentally decreed educational 'brand'.

Compared to the above-quoted principal, one other member of our research project's group of principals showed a more easy-going, hands-on approach to the obligatory task of implementing *Education for GNH* in his school. The implementation was simply one among a large amount of managerial tasks that had been decided upon from above. His job was that of helping the teachers get the gist of what was here at stake. As described by himself, his most important infusion strategy aimed at staff members was to act as a role model by practising and showing how GNH may put its mark on interpersonal relations. He hoped and expected that the teachers would act in a like manner when being with their students. Yet, whether things actually worked that way, he couldn't know for sure.

From the interview with a third principal (406-37) the following list of GNH infusion may be constructed:

- Modeling: being role model to the students
- Verbalizing what mutual expectations we have to each other
- Teachers, principals and community do joint actions and projects
- Have talks with students about what they might be doing during weekends
- Engage in talks with children about healthy habits

## **5. There are diverse feelings about meditation (mindfulness)**

Mixed sentiments were also expressed concerning the brief meditation exercise which – in the context of *Educating for GNH* – is supposed to mark the beginning of every lesson. As classroom observers, it was our general impression that meditation affected students' abilities to concentrate and to learn in a positive manner. Earlier in the text, we met one student who had greatly benefited from being a dedicated user of mindfulness practices. Yet, instances were also observed where the preparation for mindfulness in the classroom was not taken seriously by some students and/or teachers.

*...only some teacher takes it seriously! (507-150)*

*...we are supposed to do meditation in the class...But frankly, that practice has become something like a routine, quite mechanical. Like you go to the class and say "OK, it's meditation time", and you close your eyes. I don't know how far any genuine meditation is taking place. One person may be sick, he just has to close his eyes like everybody and pretend to be meditating. But his stomach hurts! (112-106)*

In an interview (111) a small group of students express their criticism of how the GNH campaign turns out to function in practice in their school:

***What is your perception on GNH?***

*Respondent 1: GNH is the concept that everybody has to be happy. But we can see that not everybody is happy. We are not getting wholesome education. Some might have many talents, some are good in dancing, some are good in singing. But not all are getting the chance because all we have to focus is on academics. It is not true that everybody is good at academics. GNH is a concept not being followed. It is a concept where everybody is happy. But it is not practically being applied.*

*Has the concept of GNH influenced your school life?*

*Several respondent: No.*

*You all do mindful training in the class, does it has some effects on you?*

*Respondent 2: Everybody is not doing that - just sitting there, just pretending to do it.*

*Do you see the ideas of GNH being applied in the school environment?*

*Respondent 1: Administration is trying their best. But we think of GNH only meditation comes into our mind, nothing else.*

In general, however, the meditation evidently have effects on the students' abilities to concentrate and thereby also on their learning opportunities. The positive influence on concentration is apparent by observation in so far as the students' activities and orientation change radically from before to after the meditation. This allows a dedicated teaching-learning interplay to take place, but does not in itself, of course, guarantee that any such interplay commences. Some of the students are convinced of the worth of the meditation practice as preparation for their own learning. One of them expresses it like this:

*For me when I do meditation, I used to do it seriously and in class I can concentrate more in studies while teachers are teaching. (207-100)*

## **6. Theoretical discussion**

The described observations of teachers apparently lacking interest in the students or only being attentive to the most active students accord well with recognized theories in the teaching-learning field dealing specifically with the impact teacher's role and personality have on student learning (e.g. Hattie 2003; Helmke 2013; Ramsden 2003; Rogers 1983). This appears to be an aspect of socialization in the schools, which is contrary to the principle of educating for happiness. Students' motivation and learning processes are greatly in-

fluenced by teacher's personal style-of-approach, role awareness and ways of encouraging the individual student to engage in learning. According to the same theorists, students' active, self-responsible participation in collaborative group work enhances their development of self-respect and self-worth. We frequently observed teachers' communicative and instructional differentiation between so-called 'fast learners' and 'slow learners', which may render any positive change-of-position difficult for the latter. This phenomenon can be interpreted as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' (Merton 1968) meaning that the very behaviour of the teacher creates the situation that he (less correctly) takes for granted. Likewise, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) talked about a 'Pygmalion effect' in order to indicate that the teacher's obvious expectations about a student influence the student's subsequent performance.

The principle of *Educating for GNH* regards the teacher as a professional person whose help and guidance are essential for placing the student on the path towards happiness. This view of the teacher matches well with the pedagogical thinking embedded in Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978). Obviously, there are examples of successful promotion of GNH as Bhutan's approach to the modern global society. When teaching democracy a teacher could link the subject to GNH, for instance by emphasizing that true democracy can be the way to successful gross national happiness in Bhutan. Likewise, some of the students express their appreciation of freedom and the conviction that wellbeing within the entire nation would be associated with freedom.

When happiness is understood as a lasting experience of well-being and quality of life, which is closely related to the ethical topics of virtues in cultural and social communities, it becomes clear that 'the emotional learning' or socialization during the school life is of decisive importance to the population's happiness. Our empirical investigation touches and renders the surface only of this learning. The GNH campaigns and initiatives that we observed in the schools were focused on cognitive qualifications rather than emotional capabilities and on top-down regulation of the field of school institution rather than bottom-up cultivation of teachers' and students' institut-

ed habitus. Socialization is a largely spontaneous and emerging type of learning, which clings to the lived expressions and perceptions of values, recognition and identification within a community. It was not possible in our research project to dive deeply into these matters, which it takes considerable resources and a tight-knit research team to uncover and illuminate.

Socialization is a basic, elementary form of learning, variously conceived as intuitive, exemplary, situated, or narrative (Bruner 1996, Gardner 1991, Negt 1968, Lave & Wenger 1991). Starting in early childhood, the socialization particularly advances capabilities and competences that may be labeled as 'tacit knowledge', 'knowing how' or 'sense for the game'. Research on organizational learning in Asia has been attentive to the topic of socialization and related questions of cultural difference from the Western world as well as within Asia. Applying Hofstede's taxonomy (1980), it has often been emphasized that in distinction from the West, Asia is generally marked by collectivism and a high level of power distance within the population. However, Nonaka and colleagues have pointed to a community based form of learning characteristic to advanced Japanese firms, which pays less attention to hierarchical systems and is open to the sharing and discussion of various knowledge and ideas (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995; Nonaka, Toyama & Voelpel 2006).

Famously, Nonaka describes socialization as a tacit-to-tacit knowledge transfer, typically found in the traditional apprenticeship, which requires face-to-face interaction or living in the same environment because the socialization is informal and contextual. Snell and Hong (2011) have pointed to a third principle of social organization that is also widespread in Asia, the networks of personal relations, known in Chinese as *Guanxi*, which is a principle of coordination and obligation through kinship and social ties that stands in stead of the relatively weak legal systems. The authors argue that the barriers to collective learning that this organizational principle implies can be overcome through motivation, mobilization and support with adequate conceptual and human resources to address tacit knowledge and socialization in exemplary ways (Snell & Hong 2011, p. 650-651).

Nevertheless, for socialization within the school institution to be thematized globally in the perspective of cultural happiness it must be acknowledged that decisive open questions are implied concerning the conceptualization of community versus individuality and authority versus autonomy. These issues are not only heavily loaded with diverse sentiments but also rather poorly conceived in many scientific approaches as well as political discussions.

## PART III: THE QUALITY OF TEACHING-LEARNING



The concept of learning and the quality of teaching is constantly in focus for leaders and educators all over the world, not least influenced by political interests aiming at more effective use of the economic resources for education and simultaneously educating students more effectively and with higher quality. There is a belief that by focusing on what students need to learn, innovative teaching tools founded on student-centeredness will emerge. – And maybe they will?

Fundamentally you may talk about two different teaching and learning discourses ; 1) teaching equals one teacher delivering to students in a classroom; and 2) teaching and learning involve teachers creating learning environments conducive to students' learning (a constructivist approach , see for instance Piaget, 1952). In practice most teachers will let themselves be guided by both discourses.

Based on extensive work with different learning theories, the Danish researcher Illeris (2009) has developed a holistic theoretical approach to teaching and learning. Some of the theories are more-or-less overlapping, and some of them are referring back to more traditional understandings, while others are exploring new ways of thinking. His work is inspired by researchers as for instance, Alheit, 1994 (biographical learning), Argyris & Schön, 1996 (the reflective practitioner) , Engeström, 1987 (expansive learning) , Kolb, 1984 (experiential learning) , Mezirow, 1978 (critical reflections and transformative learning), Piaget, 1952 (cognitive processes), Wenger, 1999 (social theories about learning and the development of identity), Vygotsky 1978 (the Zone of Proximal Development (ZOPED)).

When a student has to learn something, it implies, according to the author, integration of two important processes, an external interaction process between the student (the learner) and his or her social, cultural or material environment, and an internal psychological process of thinking, elaboration and acquisition of knowledge and skills. Further, the learning process includes a process of integrated interplay between two equally important psychological functions, i.e. 1) the student must be able to manage the content to be learned (content function); and 2) the student must have the necessary mental energy (motivation, emotions, volition) needed for driving the learning processes (incentive function). Learning will always involve these three dimensions related to interaction, contents and incentive, respectively. (Illeris, 2009)

The internal process of a learner's/student's content acquisition and elaboration is always (according to Illeris) affected by impulses from such interaction processes as are going on with fellow students, teachers and others from the environment. Interaction processes may, to some extent, be shaped by the way teaching is organized, the climate in the physical surroundings, e.g. the classroom, and teacher attitudes.

Generally speaking, learning theorists have, since long ago, been aware of close connections existing between cognitive and the emotional aspects of learning processes (e.g. Vygotsky 1978; Furth 1987). According to Illeris (2009) such ideas have recently been corroborat-

ed through advances in cognitive neuroscientific research (Damasio, 1994).

Through processes like, e.g., perception, transmission, experience, imitation, activity, participation, the interaction dimension provides the impulses that initiate learning processes (Illeris 2007, pp. 100ff.). The interaction dimension supports the learner's personal integration in communities and society and thereby also builds up his/her social identity and sociality.

### **Teacher roles**

Generally speaking, teachers spend a lot of time together with students, trying to teach them, not only the relevant subject matter, but also the values of a country and proper ways of behaving in society (*Bildung*). American research projects back in the 1960es (Ryans,1960) show that personal characteristic of the teacher play an important role in shaping what and how much students learn from the teacher's teaching efforts. In this context, special focus has been on such relational qualities as compassion and engagement, as compared to aloofness and apparent lack of interest. These findings correlate well with research done by Ramsden (2003).

Rogers (1983) defines the teacher's primary task as being that of *permitting students to learn*, namely by letting them guide themselves by their own curiosity. Rogers' ideas functioned as signals to many teachers, indirectly urging them to change their habitual attitudes and ways of teaching. Rather than, first and foremost, seeing themselves as *providers of information* to students, they should move towards a *student-centered didactic format* (teaching and learning) where students are actively searching initiators of their own learning processes, while teachers flexibly move between roles as information providers (based on student needs) and student mentors (learning process facilitators).

Roger's approach was based on lot of educational research in the 1960s. However, current researchers as for instance Ramsden (2003) and J. Hattie (2013) represent theoretical approaches matching that of Rogers. Both researchers have developed their theories by analyzing wide-scaled data material. Based on longitudinal quantitative studies, Hattie has reached to the conclusion that a triad comprising

1) teacher relationship with students; 2) transparent and well described and well communicated goals related to the subject matters; and 3) rules for students' work, seems to represent the most important factors for good teaching and successful students' learning

### **Peer learning**

Originally the concept of peer learning was developed by Boud (2001) through his focusing on the 'normal' ways in which people learn in their everyday lives. He emphasizes that learning from each other is not only a feature of informal learning, but that it occurs in all situations at all levels. Also students have conversations about what they are learning in and out of class rooms, and when stuck on a problem, they normally ask another student and definitely not the teacher. Students learn from each other. The power of peer learning has, according to Boud, proved to be manifest. He emphasizes that if teachers deem their own doings to be more important than what the students do, they fool themselves and prevent students from learning the most essential things, such as how to learn from others, problem solving, and the like. Thus, peer learning puts demands on teachers to have faith in their students as inherently resourceful and not the opposite. In this context, Borgmann & Ørbech (2010) refer to the so-called Pygmalion or Rosenthal effect which, based on experiments, has proved beyond doubt that teachers' positive attitudes and expectations towards their students will help the latter grow and learn.

### **Factors that underpin quality teaching and learning processes**

Having the notion of learning (i.e. students acquiring knowledge, skills and attitude) as a perspective the next step is to decide how to organize teaching activities that lead to the relevant and intended learning. It has proved useful to apply a kind of didactic<sup>8</sup> system as a tool for optimizing these processes that may direct students towards acquiring the relevant knowledge and attitudes within a certain subject area and educational context.

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8 The theory of teaching and learning

The *didactic* is here understood as the *theory of teaching and learning* and represents the complexity of elements, such as the character of the subject area, learning goals, students prerequisites, teaching and assessment forms and not least the teacher as a carrier of a unique set of values and understandings concerning the proper practice of teaching. All these elements are aligned and integrated in, and also affect the didactical processes.

The understanding referred to here is inspired by Dale (1999). Dale is dealing with the concept of professionalism as part of a didactic rational framework of understanding. To him the concept of didactics links to the objectives, contents, methodology and evaluation of teaching. He emphasizes that schools only develop professionally if they act with awareness about scientific knowledge and reflected experiences. His approach is organized around concepts for three different levels of professionalism in schools:

1. *Implement education (K1)*
2. *Construct educational programs (K2)*
3. *Communicate on the basis of didactic theory (K3)*

With this approach Dale puts focus on teacher's role and teacher's professionalism. Other references are Jank and Meyer (2006), who represent a holistic and dynamic approach to the didactics. They emphasize the importance of the didactics, both as a scientific and a very practical approach that aims at capturing the tensions between all the elements that affect all teaching. They also emphasize the importance of the historical and political perspectives on education. The didactic approach has for decades proved to be useful for teachers in their continuous work with planning, practicing, analyzing, reflecting and continuously developing teaching in ways that fit the intended learning goals, while also taking into consideration the diversity of students and environments and not least the character of the subject areas.

The values and policies of a nation are, together with learning goals, operationalized in the curricula and have a tremendous impact at the micro level (the single school and the single classroom with its

students). The ways in which learning goals are described and understood by the teacher, as culture carrier, are essential and guiding factors for how teaching will be organized. This process is naturally guided by the way the teacher understands learning, his/her beliefs, values, experiences with and abilities in relation to, organizing teaching – and, further, with the way these factors align with the goals of students and their background experiences and interests. Each teaching situation is unique, and according to didactic understanding teachers must have the professional capability to analyze the situation-at-hand with a view to 1) practicing the best and most effective and relevant teaching within the given environments and given situation; 2) on a continual basis assess students' learning outcome adequately and evaluate own teaching. Knowledge about how the teaching functioned is the foundation for teacher's ongoing professional development. Teachers' professionalism builds upon their capability to continuously develop their teaching in relation to each element in the didactic model. As here understood, teaching implies different kinds of teaching (didactic formats), sometimes 'spoon feeding' students and sometimes practicing student-centered and student-directed teaching where students are working with solving problems themselves or with fellow students (peers).

Consequently, choices of teaching and assessment formats have to be made based on the didactic analyses and understanding, and always related to the given situational context. Choosing one single way of practicing teaching ('one size fits all') doesn't make sense. The choices depend on the kind of subject area, which is in focus and the student's resources, experiences and weaknesses.

## **1. Classroom practice is teacher-centered, syllabus-driven and applying student-centered methods**

The analysis was carried out according to the following procedure:

1. First of all, a meticulous reading was done of all data documents from the 5 cases

2. Next, relevant interview quotes from teachers, students, parents and principals were grouped into thematic categories of relevance for teaching-learning. A variety of practical approaches and/or intellectual/emotional attitudes towards issues of teaching-learning quality hereby became apparent.
3. We then searched for recurrent patterns in the material. When the focus is on teaching and learning, it is relevant to focus on three widely accepted dimensions in the field: the cognitive, the emotional/motivational and the interaction-oriented dimensions (cf. Illeris' so-called learning triangle). Many different approaches/attitudes may in principle be comprised within each of the three dimensions. By searching for patterns in the empirical data, some distinctions and variations within each dimension emerged. Thus, the cognitive dimension is stretched out between conceptualizations of knowledge as (a) scholastic and syllabus-driven versus (b) personally constructed and based on the student's Zone of Proximal Development (ZOPED-driven; cf. Vygotsky). The interaction dimension is stretched out between (a) a teacher-centered versus (b) a student-centered understanding of the interaction. The emotional dimension is stretched out between (a) strictness/ fear versus (b) kindness/ well-being. The polarities inherent in the three dimensions are shown in the following matrix :

Cognitive dimension	Syllabus-driven teaching-learning	ZOPED-driven teaching-learning
Interaction dimension	Teacher-centered	Student-centered
Emotional dimension	Disciplined, fearful atmosphere	Friendly, confident atmosphere

These dimensions will be used to organize our discussion of the material. We start, however, by presenting our findings in closer affinity with our empirical data as such:

Generally speaking, we found the following characteristics of teaching-learning in the classroom:

- Knowledge is basically understood as scholastic knowledge (abstract)
- Teacher-centeredness and teacher's control are used as main instruments for managing the learning process
- Student-centered learning is understood as any kind of activity where the students are active. As used by teachers the term 'student-centeredness' covers a wide range of activities, e.g. from copying textbook material to engaging in group work.
- The standard format of the single lesson involves two steps: first teacher lectures; afterwards students will be activated in some way.
- Teachers manage the classroom and the teachers organize the single lesson. The students acknowledge the teacher's authority to decide what the class should do and how. Everybody is engaging in the planned activity – or, at least, nobody is seen disrupting or sidetracking teaching activities as programmed by teacher
- Teaching seems to be effective in terms of fulfilling the purpose of imparting the syllabus of the day to the students.
- Formative assessment is used as a way of testing the student's knowledge of syllabus.
- The atmosphere of the teacher-class relationship affects the students' readiness to interact with the teacher
- Students would like to be more active in the class room and have the chance to discuss things in groups. More on this theme in statement number 3.

### **1.1 The standard format of the single lesson: first teacher lectures; afterwards students are somehow activated**

We start by reporting from our observations of classroom teaching-learning activity. Our material shows lessons (except for repetition lessons) to be managed in quite similar ways. The teacher uses the first part of lesson to present and explain the pertinent content

theme (textbook material) to the students. During the second part of the lesson students – as guided by teacher – are more actively involved in assimilating the content theme. A typical class observation runs as follows:

*The activities during the lesson comprised of two sections:*

*Teacher providing explanation on the topic*

*Students solving the problems given by the teacher, which the students were supposed to solve based on the information fed by the teacher.*

*The students were handpicked by the teacher to demonstrate how the problem was solved by them to the whole class. The teacher supplemented the student's inputs (feedback) wherever required. The level of interaction between the teacher and the student was good during the class presentation, but it was a one way dialogue during the first section of the class (during teacher input). (201)*

Details may vary, especially as far as the second lesson part is concerned. What makes the above example 'typical' are the following characteristics:

- The lesson is distinctly organized (managed) by the teacher.
- Teacher is central to the dissemination of knowledge.
- The students become active only after teacher's presentation today's content theme.
- The student-centered activities comply fully with instructions provided by teacher.
- The student-centered activities engage individual students in problem solving activities (in other 'typical' examples, problem solving may take place in groups) as well as in subsequent presentations of their problem solutions to the class plenary.

In this particular example, the observer has not specified the relative amounts of time spent on the two activities, but simply states that

*(t)he instruction was mostly in the form of the teacher feeding the information to the students (201).*

Several observers and informers use terms that associate education with feeding. A lesson may be described as a 'spoon-fed session'.

### **1.2 For teachers in our sample, the term 'student-centered' seems to have a very wide range of application.**

As illustrated above, student activities are integrated in the standard lesson format. When teachers are asked, they speak very approvingly of such activities. The following quote is typical of the attitude among teachers:

*In the student centered learning, students they learn by them and actually us practices this method in the school, is a common method which is practice everywhere. Student learnt much and they feel alert and they learning by doing. Instead of teacher involve and talking all the time in the class, student they learn a lot by themselves. I feel at the end of day they might feel that they have, that is, a day might be a fruitful one. (302)*

Teachers seem to apply the term student-centered to any activity that engages students in ways other than listening to and hopefully interiorizing the teacher's message: from copying text written by the teacher on the blackboard to engaging in problem-based group work. Yet, it is obvious that the learning potential of these different activities varies widely. Copying text from the blackboard may be done in quite a mechanical manner, i.e. without the student necessarily making an effort to grasp the intellectual or practical or personal implications of what is copied. Contrariwise, by engaging students in open-ended problem solving tasks their active, personal engage-

ment in processes of comprehension is, to a much higher degree, ensured

Dialogue between teacher and students is one other important aspect of classroom-based teaching-learning. Dialogue forms differ in their challenge impact on the students' comprehension of the subject matter. At one end of the spectrum we have fact-oriented questioning – in at least two versions: The teacher may pose questions as a means of testing whether the students can repeat the subject matter just presented by teacher; or the students may use questions as a means of obtaining subject matter clarification from the teacher. At the other end of the spectrum dialogue is used as a means of facilitating or widening students' understanding-based learning processes. Questions posed or tasks given by teacher may invite the student into processes of induction (clarifying the theoretical logic governing a series of described events), deduction (constructing self-made concrete examples/instances of certain theoretical principles) or abduction (making conjectures about possible ways of handling certain problem situations).

A third way of facilitating learning is through cooperative activities where the students work together and solve tasks in pairs or in groups. Our data material shows instances of such group work. Several teachers express skeptical attitudes towards the method based on the – experience-supported? – belief that the problem solving work is done exclusively by the dominant group members, with the implication that only they, and not their less dominant peers acquire any learning. This belief is contested by one teacher (402) who emphasizes that if only group size is kept relatively small (4-5 persons), more group members will be inclined to contribute.

Formative assessment is one teaching-learning area that received special attention in our interviews. The area displays the same distinction as has been highlighted above: between procedures favoring rote learning and fact retention versus procedures enhancing students' understanding-based learning. If the self, peer or teacher assessment is conducted as a right-or-wrong check of task solutions, then the activity does not necessarily facilitate the student's process of understanding. But if the assessment is done as an open-ended quality

evaluation and is expressed through a qualitative response, then reflection and novel understanding are more likely to become activated. Our data material holds only one assessment example of the latter variety. The example concerns a teacher's feedback on homework. Homework evaluation is discussed in many interviews, and students explicitly refer to such feedback as being helpful to their learning process. Yet, our reading of the data material suggests that this area of teacher-student exchange carries much un-used learning potential. Typically feedback examples mentioned have a very feeble meaning content, such as "good work" or "work harder", i.e. with no detailed, qualitative information value for improving the student's learning habits.

In general, class-room events seem to follow a standard format. In the first part of the lesson the teacher lectures on the syllabus contents of the day. During the second part students (as instructed by teacher) become active in other ways than just listening. These additional activities (named student-centered by teacher) vary greatly in their potential for inviting students into processes of comprehension, reflection and discovery.

### **1.3 The atmosphere of the teacher-class relationship effects students' readiness to interact with the teacher**

The classroom atmosphere – consisting of emotional well-being and motivational climate – is the focal point of this sub-section.

The teacher's approach to motivation affects the quality of education. The following statement covers many teachers' view on student motivation:

*One [way of motivation] is reinforcement. If you submit on time, you get a bonus mark of this. If you don't submit on time, threat is also there that certain marks will be deducted from you. (508).*

This view on motivating also colors teachers' typical feedback style (already referred to) as part of formative assessment. Students receive

generalized reinforcement through positively evaluative comments, e.g., “good work”. Our observation material shows no examples of teacher comments that are phrased as clear punishment (negative reinforcement). Negative comments are phrased in an action-oriented manner, e.g. “improve your handwriting”. Generally speaking we read the material as indicating that teachers are careful not to harm the students’ motivation through feedback of a punishing nature.

The quality of interaction between students and teacher is also important in shaping the emotional well-being and motivational climate of the classroom. Harsh discipline creates students who are afraid of being punished by the teacher. Such students will not open up and expose their academic difficulties. Consequently the teacher will be unable to discern and make contact with the student’s Zone of Proximal Development. Conversely, in an open and trusting atmosphere the students will readily open up and seek the teacher’s help for clarifying doubts. This statement is typical of the teachers view:

*As a teacher you should have so much of respect from the student but not fear .... And the way we address the students and the words we use to the student, like sometimes we have the tendency to criticize them and that need to be improved and i guess it will help them in learning. (307)*

In the traditional Bhutanese classroom teachers were known to be strict and to secure students’ obedience through fear of punishment. Such traditional strictness was not found during our classroom observation – and teachers may see this as pedagogically beneficial:

*In our times our teacher used to be so harsh and beat and all and we were lacking behind in learning process due to the fear. So this type of things needs to be avoided in today’s generations. Doing this students will be approachable and learning would be better. (307)*

Yet, in our interviews strictness and fear is a much debated issue, both among students (who, generally speaking, opt for kind, friendly teachers) and parents (who, generally speaking, opt for teachers of the strict variety). We return to these themes in later sections, concerning statements 3 and 4 below.

In the table below we have summarized our above discussions by ordering the various activities described above along the lines suggested in our introductory remarks, i.e. based on a distinction between syllabus-driven versus ZOPED-driven teaching-learning forms:

Syllabus-driven	ZOPED-driven
Teacher presentation the topic of the day in accordance with textbook	Examples, explications and discussions that go beyond the text book
Student reading of textbook	
Student copying text from blackboard	
Fact-oriented question-answer exchanges with the goal of making the student a mental replica of the teacher; cf. Freire's so-called 'banking concept'	Open-ended question-answer exchanges that require the student to search for self-constructed answers based on his/her personal and provisional understanding of the subject matter
	Problem solving individually or in groups
	Discussions in pairs or groups (often low achiever combined with high achiever)
Applying formative assessment based on right/wrong criteria	Applying formative assessment based on qualitative analysis
Motivation through reward and / or punishment	Motivation through creating interest and learning zeal, e.g. by varying the teaching methods, going beyond the textbook, linking curriculum to real-world issues, etc.
Teacher-student contact barriers based on students' fear of teacher's reprisals	Open, confident atmosphere

We have described the teaching-learning climate as *to a large extent* syllabus-driven. It is *not only* syllabus-driven. The following three

teacher quotes (concerning the respondent's preferred ways of motivating students) testify to that:

*One is role play where there is presentation. Then what I do is role play, poem recitation I make them come in the class. Poem recitation it not only develops their cognitive capacity but also the confidence levels like when you do extempore speech, recitation then question answering, presentation, then group work, think pair and share that you know, you are in a pair. Pair work is given. You have to think and then we try to role play that we try to derive their opinions and all. (504)*

*[Motivation is created] By designing activity-based lessons, demonstrating and taking students to the lab. [It engages the student] When I asks them to do the experiments in the lab. [It diminishes the students motivation] when I have to explain the procedures and make theoretical inputs. They simply listen to the information fed by the teacher. " (204)*

*First and foremost thing to motivate children is to make them realise what is the importance behind the lesson, how can they be benefited by learning? So you as a teacher should not only make sure that the lesson that you are learning is only for exam. So your dimension should be far beyond the exam. Exam is one of the way through which we can see student is doing good or bad. But it should not be, you should make sure by saying that it should have a lifelong impact. Not only for today bt for all times to come. So you should accept them to change and make them a better person. So we should make them aware of all those... " (304)*

## **2. Teachers describe (aspects of) their working conditions as impediments to optimal teaching-learning**

The teacher's interview guide was designed to cover the three themes of (1) quality of teaching and learning; (2) formative assessment and

(3) GNH respectively. The following analyses and discussions are mostly based on statements regarding the first theme: quality of teaching and learning. Teachers' responses related to this theme were prompted by the following tentative list of questions:

1. With your years of experience in teaching what factors engage students in learning?
2. Do you get enough time to do all the activities in the class?
3. What are some of the difficulties you face in classroom teaching?
4. What is your overall view of formative assessment?

Many interviewed teachers indicate that the very act of teaching, helping students to learn and grow etc., gives them much personal pleasure. As such, these qualities are important parameters in their over-all experience of 'working conditions'. In our analyses below, however, we are specifically looking for instances where teachers describe aspects of their working conditions as impediments to optimal teaching-learning. One set of such instances may be classified as excessive workload, either due to (1) class size or (2) size of syllabus. Other working condition aspects experienced as problematic relate to (1) availability of resources and (2) intrusions - experienced as distractions - from the surrounding civil society. We close this section by referring to school principals' expressed views concerning the management of teachers' working conditions.

## **2.1 Teachers' opinion about the number of students in the classroom and class size**

In four out of five cases (Yoltsee being the exception) interviewed teachers mention 'crowded classroom' as one important factor impeding effective teaching-learning.

Thus, Phuentsholing teachers state that when classroom is too packed with students it hampers student engagement in learning, and teachers face difficulties in organizing student centred activities as there is hardly any space for the teacher to move around (402).

With specific reference to their practical capacity to do formative assessment of students, Samtse teachers (when answering the question: “Do you have anything in mind which will enhance/improve student learning in the classroom?”) express concern over the number of students in a classroom: When students are many, individual attention cannot be given as required in a formative assessment context (102).

Likewise, in Peljorling formative assessment is said to be a “total failure” mainly due to time constraints. Formative assessment is not possible for a teacher who is teaching in 10 sections having 40 students in each section (308).

The Gedu teacher interview highlights that correcting the work submitted by students becomes a daunting task. This is linked to having high ratio of student to a teacher (508).

## **2.2 Availability of resources affects quality teaching and learning**

Even though the theme was not explicitly brought up by the interviewer, Phuentsholing teachers spontaneously mention the state of classroom infrastructure and availability of teaching learning materials as affecting the quality of teaching and learning. The library resources as well as internet access (which, unfortunately, may be unavailable to students) provide additional facilities for teacher’s delivery of subject matter knowledge to the students (402).

The teachers also pointed out that there is a need to revise and update the content of school textbooks especially in history.

## **2.3 Vast syllabus and a big jump in content from class 10 syllabus to class 11 syllabus**

In Samtse the teachers referred to vast syllabus and less time to teach as hindering the quality of teaching and learning. They said the amount of content to teach is not proportionate to the time allocated.

*We are short of time every time. Mathematics we never finish teaching in the present syllabus. It is very, very difficult. We have so many 101 questions and now if you solve all the problems, you will not finish. So, we always run short of time. (112)*

More specifically they referred to a big jump in size-of- content from class 10 to class 11. The vastness of syllabus is also expressed by teachers of Phuentsholing and Peljorling school teachers.<sup>9</sup>

## **2.4 Relations between school and surrounding civil society**

In one un-transcribed interview with a recently appointed ‘urban school’ principal, the interviewee (‘quoted’ from memory) described his present job assignment as relatively un-challenging compared to his previous one, namely as school principal in a far-away rural part of Bhutan. The earlier challenges –experienced as personally and professionally gratifying by the interviewee – had, most importantly, been concerned with building and strengthening the school’s role as educative center, not only for the children/pupils, in a scholastic sense, but for the general social welfare of the entire surrounding district and its inhabitants. The challenges described by the said principal had not been ‘invented’ by him as an expression of personal talents or interests, but are an expression of officially decreed government policy.

By teachers, the many societal functions attaching to the school as a public institution may be experienced as so many potentially fatiguing distractions from teachers’ core function, namely to manage classroom-based teaching-learning:

*School has become the target of all the policy decision. Health will come, dzongkhag will come. Just day before yesterday, there was mental health program. Before that there was rabies work-*

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9 Cf. 402, 404, 308.

shop. So, all these things are few weeks ago we had young Bhutanese poet sharing his experiences in the assembly time. ( ... ). Most possibly sent by the office of education minister to inculcate that kind of poetic writing. So, school has become the hot bed of everyone's agenda. Then we have regional tournament, intra tournament and CE classes coming in. So many and even we get tired. When I was in class 9, our teacher used to enjoy life, freedom after teaching. They need not go anywhere and relax after teaching . Next morning they used to come to class very fresh. Nowadays, we are pulled in the ground also, we are pulled in the kitchen also. (112)

In the same interview the life of students, under present-day circumstances, is described as being

... over-burdened. That's why their interest is lagging behind. They come to the school in the morning . Then there is SUPW. They will have to work for 15minutes. Teachers guide them. After that your assembly will run for another half an hour in the hot sun weather always. When you go in the first period only they are somewhat sweating and they don't have the mood. And our this structure are such that it is very hot. Then throughout the day they study and after 6<sup>th</sup> period they have remedial class. After remedial class, we say you have co-curricular activities – football and all that. Some are singing and dancing. So, by the time they go home, it is already 4.30 to 5 and maybe at home they are also not given that kind of rest by the parents. Therefore, now a days when I see the students ( ... ) they don't show interest in studies , they have become more aggressive. ( ... ) Basically, we don't find that kind of energy which we in Samtse college of education or NIE used to assume and say students are very energetic, very active. Only thing is that from the teachers' side we will have to work and they will learn by themselves. But reality is different. (ibid)

## **2.5 One suggestion for improving working conditions**

As stated above, in this section we have been looking for descriptions of working conditions experienced as professionally problematic by the interviewed teachers. We didn't specifically ask our interviewees to suggest remedies. One suggestion for improved working conditions was spontaneously produced by the Samtse higher secondary school teachers. In their opinion teacher exchange programme with nearby schools might be of help in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. The teachers felt that students get bored to see the face of same teacher teaching subject matter throughout the year. (112)

## **2.6 School principals' views on teachers' working conditions**

As middle managers, school principals are professionally obliged to take an interest in the working conditions for their teaching staff. In our interviews, such issues were not made subject to any elaborate discussion. School principals were simply asked "... how you and your teaching staff ensure quality of education in your school", and, further, to illustrate their narratives with success stories or problem stories. The question gave rise to descriptions of the monitoring system whereby teachers' do observations in each other's classrooms with a view to joint assessment and dissemination among their teaching staff of 'best practice' components. As part of his description, one principal stated that even though, in principle, he considered it justified that monitoring teachers were compensated through work load reduction, such compensation was impracticable due to "the general shortage of teachers" (206). Another principal mentioned that the implementation of formative assessment procedures was hampered due to time pressure and a vast syllabus (406).

A third principal alludes to an uneven distribution of job-satisfaction, and, by implication, -motivation among Bhutanese teachers:

*... in fact i must tell you, about 80% of the teachers of Bhutan are not rely happy with their profession. (306)*

This unhappy state of affairs he links to the fact that not all teachers had joined the profession as an expression of personal choice, and also to the lack of social recognition from society at large.

And when no recognition is given to the teachers i think teacher also some time lack interest and when teachers lack interest i think standard is affected. (ibid)

### **3. Students may provide important guidelines with a view to improving teaching-learning**

Five documents from our data material contain transcriptions of student focus group interviews<sup>10</sup>. Class levels VII through XI are covered. Each focus group was composed of eight students, four girls and four boys<sup>11</sup> meaning that our sample altogether consists of 40 students. Transcripts don't allow for identification of individual respondents or their gender. For this reason, all respondent statements will be understood as belonging to one generalized 'student voice'.

The focus group interview guide was designed to cover the three themes of (1) quality of teaching and learning; (2) formative assessment and (3) GNH respectively. The following analyses and discussions are mostly based on statements regarding the first theme: quality of teaching and learning. Students' responses related to this theme were prompted by the following tentative list of questions:

1. How do you like good teaching to be?
2. When do you think you learn the most?
3. What do you think of the engagement of the students in the classroom?
4. What can the teacher do to enhance students' participation?
5. How does the teacher take into account, that there are differences of ability among the students?

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10 Documents 111, 207, 307, 407 and 507.

11 Document 407 does not indicate number of students and gender distribution.

The five questions listed represent a movement from the students' broad depiction of the optimal, i.e. pedagogically most productive interplay between teacher and learner (questions 1-2) towards a relatively more narrow description and discussion of pedagogically conducive classroom practice patterns (questions 3-5). The same movement shall guide us in the below explications.

### **3.1 Students' thoughts about the pedagogically optimal teacher-learner relationship**

Frank and frankness are the expressions that are most often used when students are asked to describe what good teaching and good teachers are like (207, 307, 507). The 'local' meaning of the frankness-term is best highlighted by referring to its antinomies as named by students. In the Yoeltse case the frank teacher is described as one who is not "very serious to us". The "very serious" teacher is one with whom students will definitely not want to "share (their) problems". And the respondent continues:

*So in that way [i.e. if no sharing of problems occurs] there will be no learning of both teachers and students. (207)*

In the interview, this statement is followed up by another respondent who – apart from emphasizing the collaborative aspect of frankness – sees it as desirable that the teacher

*also creates fun during learning process and make(s) the class lively. (ibid)*

The Gedu case lends support to the idea that fun-making and induction of liveliness are part of 'the frankness syndrome':

*What kind of teaching do you like?  
We like active class and if the teachers joke with us and be frank, that class we like. (507)*

For these students the opposite to frankness is termed strictness – and strictness is then described as teacher's overly concern with students' achievement level in a formal sense:

*... when teachers are so strict and when they are strictly concerned about the students and their character, students do (..) not feel free to ask their doubts. Sometime(s) that doubt remain(s) in them and then, even in exam, they are not able to solve that problem. I think teachers should not be that strict. (ibid)*

In the same vein one Peljorling student tells his/her personal story about how teacher strictness became a demotivating factor as far as mathematics was concerned. According to this student motivation is brought about by teacher's

*frankness with the student. (O)nce I have experience(d) a very strict teacher in mathematics, and from there on may be because of strictness of the teacher I didn't have much interest in maths though he teaches very well but due to the fear that I had inside with him I couldn't learn ... (307)*

A few sentences later, however, the student's general repudiation of teacher strictness is somewhat modified – seemingly due to a consideration that strictness may reflect a dedication to the professional aims of teaching, i.e. bringing about learning in the students:

*... one way they should be strict, but one way they are very frank, not only very strict, (then) there will be a very conducive learning environment. (ibid)*

Students of the Samtse case do not make active use of the term frankness. Yet, with what seems to be the same intent, one student praises the *friendly* teacher

*with whom we can talk freely (... ) clear our doubts (... ) like our friend, we can share anything, our emotional problems and difficulty in studies (...) I like this type of teaching. (111)*

When reading this statement, we get the impression – even though the student doesn't explicitly say so – that such friendly teachers are not only figments of the respondent's imagination, but have actually been encountered in his/her school career. The quoted statement follows directly after one defending a certain teacher strictness – in the interest of getting the teaching job done:

*I want them to be a little strict, because I saw many students taking advantage of them although I cannot raise my voice and say that (he) or she is doing this or that. (ibid)*

This respondent, however, doesn't view frankness or friendliness as the most important teacher virtues, but rather a zeal for teaching:

*... some teachers, they doesn't care us they just do it because they think it is their duty (...) but there are some teachers and madams who really take care of us and who talks about our future and that kind of teaching I like ...(ibid)*

In the fifth case (Phuentsholing) the term frankness isn't used either. Yet, when responding to the question "What are those factors that engage you to remain in the class?" the three responses elicited clearly represent variations on the same themes as have been referred to above – even if strictness has lost its negative connotations (407). Thus, the first respondent singles out *three different teaching styles* all of which are described as having a positive motivational impact on students: The teaching style first mentioned by this respondent she names as *strict*:

*(T)here are many types of cases, first of all, this teacher should be strict ( ... ) if teacher is strict we remain alert in the classroom. (407)*

Later in the interview (what we believe is) the same student elaborates on the innate meaning of strictness:

*(S)ome teachers remind us about examinations and all – that is one motivation. (ibid)*

The second teaching style mentioned by this respondent carries the characteristics which in other cases have been named as *frankness*:

*(S)ometime(s) if we like the teacher, we are automatically in the class. (...) teachers share (with) us values, experiences, that is another type of motivation and also teacher advices every time telling this thing is good, that is bad. (ibid)*

The third and last teaching style mentioned by this respondent is not directly concerned with the relational climate created by the teacher, but rather with teacher's content-related teaching techniques:

*Last thing is that when teacher teaches interestingly with demonstrations and all then we usually like the class. (ibid)*

We return to these issues in the next sub-section. As to *the pedagogically optimal teacher-learner relationship*, we may say, that students' responses express a definite thematic unity, even though personal preferences vary somewhat. Generally speaking, the teacher most favored by our respondents is the frank or friendly grown-up who invites his student into a person-to-person encounter. The optimal teacher-learner relationship occurs when this frank and friendly person also manages the teaching task in a professionally efficient manner.

Amongst the 40 students who together form the students' voice of our study one single student stands out as being unambiguously in favor of the strict, rather than frank or friendly teacher. This student presents him/herself as one in need of the whip rather than the carrot:

*I consider fear to me is motivation. If somebody makes us fearful/ frightened about the exams and test(s), then we tend to engage in our academics.*

The following quote from one teacher shows a sensitivity towards his/her significant role in shaping classroom atmosphere:

*It is basically about us. For example, if we happen to go to class with mood off, then students become demotivated. And then the moment you go to the class very happy, energetic or so fresh that you want to teach them, I find the students motivated. Sometimes we are sick and then still then we go to the class. We cannot make ourselves hear and then we find that students are not interested. At the same time, if we sit and teach them, students are not interested. (102)*

### **3.2 Students' thoughts about teaching styles**

This second sub-section deals, not just with respondents' views on the teacher as a very important source of classroom atmosphere. Students' discuss the relative merits of various content-related teaching learning styles. With reference to the first-presented statement above, the sub-section may be read as reflecting students' comments on the degree to which Bhutanese classroom practices are syllabus-driven.

In four out of five student focus groups the standard comment relating to content presentation emphasizes that teacher should do more than simply repeating textbook material. In the Yoeltse case five respondents elaborate on the theme as follows:

*Good teaching means a teacher (who) teaches from his heart and not only from book.*

*... teaches from book and wrote on green board*

*... writes on the board and solving some few examples on board and not reading from books so that we students don't learn anything*

*teaches us using the board ... in maths showing us the steps and ... teaches us in enjoyable way and ( ... ) always checks information outside from books and other books. (207)*

One Gedu student expands the theme as follows:

*... few of the teachers are just there sticking to the lessons. We would like to have teaching where they could also give information beyond our lessons only and not fixed to the topic only ( ... ) more interaction and communication. (507)*

The wish for “more interaction and communication” is further specified in the following response mosaic from the Peljorling case:

... teaching that we prefer is (...) when teacher give us presentation, they divide us into groups and we give us in group works ... giving us the responsibility to find out, we would learn more, out there we could put our hard work. (...) if the teacher just they teach us, we just listen, we just forget it, but (...) when we have group work (...) if that question comes in the exam, we do remember that point very clearly because we have already discussed in our group ... when teacher give us to search in the library or somewhere else, (...) we become most happy to search something new thing, digging out some new points like in history we should find read more to know about past ... bringing more activities inside the class, giving more questions to each student, they get motivated like that (...) giving different questions to each of the students and letting them answer one by one. (307)

In a later statement, these enthusiastic pieces of advice are put into perspective – in that some teachers are said to take resort to strictness of a corporeal kind if students are unable to make satisfactory contributions to the question-answer exchanges:

*... if a student is not able to answer the questions, some teachers they tend to beat (...) and fear comes into the students. (ibid)*

Another interesting comment comes from three Gedu students who all admit to experiencing tensions between their personally felt comfort zone and their 'virtuous' learning aspirations:

*From my personal point of view I don't like (assignments). But I think for our personal benefit it is good because when we do more assignments, more project work we learn more ... to have a brighter future, more assignments, project work and activities must be done ...*

*Some individuals have stage fright, they cannot speak in front of a crowd. But like my friend said (...) if we take it in a positive way, there are some positive benefits ... when we go to other universities we don't have (stage fright) because we have already faced it during our high school. It is good, but if we go through it ourselves [without support from teacher and peers] it will be very difficult.*

*I also don't like it. When there is more assignments and (...) works to do, mentally much pressure on students and it can hamper study. (...) actually it really benefits, but from my personal view I also don't like too much of assignments. (507)*

### **3.3 Teacher-initiated versus peer-initiated learning**

The two earlier sub-sections have had their main focus on the teacher-as-agent – concluding with students' request that teachers give them problem-based learning tasks to solve. In so far as these tasks are to be solved through group efforts they open for peer-mediated teaching-learning as a supplement to the teacher-mediated teaching-learning that takes place in the classroom. As becomes apparent

below the interviewed students have a keen awareness of the learning potential embedded in the peer-group

In the Yoeltse case the interviewer asks how students deal with the learning-hampering effects of large classes

*... sometimes you don't understand. You are many in class and teacher is only one. So all of you cannot ask him or her. (207)*

In response focus group members explain how students, amongst themselves, organize a chain of knowledge transmission:

*Firstly, students who are very talkative they ask their Sir and they share the information with friends.*

*Which one do you prefer – sharing with friends or asking your parents or library or asking directly to the teacher all the time? I prefer) (d)iscussing among friends (...)While we discuss among friends, what we know, we teach our friends. (... ) When we ask teacher, we feel a little bit hesitated because there is more students and we feel hesitate. So when we ask to our friends, they teaches us in good way and we don't have to feel hesitate because they are our friends. (...)*

*From whom do you learn more – peers or teachers?*

*For me I learn mostly from my best friend. She is excellent in studies.*

*It depends upon the subject ... (in) maths ... (if) we are not able to catch up ... we learn through friends. But English ... we read from book*

*... (in) maths, if one question is having different methods, sometimes we get confused. So we go to teacher and ask. (ibid)*

Similar attitudes are expressed, both in the Phuntsholing case and in the Gedu case:

*I prefer to go to friends (rather)than teachers because ... we can talk with our friends freely. (407)*

*I feel uncomfortable with teacher. Friends are comfortable to us. With friends we can argue our points. We are at the same level and we tend to find their mistakes. But if it's a teacher, even if we have some doubts in our mind, we hesitate to say those things. But with friends we can clear out any doubts and argue with them. (507)*

In general, the mutual peer-learning theme obviously plays a significant role in the students' school-related self-understanding. Most often they talk about mutual peer-learning as a set of activities they themselves will instigate as part of their self-organized learning community, i.e. independently of the teacher's classroom management.

Our material provides one example where students describe this learning resource as being actively used by teachers:

*Some teachers they particularly call that person (i.e. a 'slow learner') and teaches. But when they don't get time, they ask intelligent ones or toppers to give help to the weaker ones. (207)*

According to the student, this way of using "topper students" as unofficial assistant teachers, may be seen as an alternative to sending the "weaker student" to a remedial class. This example has a parallel in the following quote from a teacher interview:

*In the past system the lower achiever normally neglected, the teacher used to give more attention to the high achievers, to the brighter students. And even by words students actually before learning by such hard words of the teachers, they were defeated in learning. .... therefore, the low achievers low level intelligent students they should be actually mingled with the high achievers. They should be kept in a group of better intellectual students and we need to, even from the teacher's part, we need usually take extra time, extra periods, these are some of the ways.*

Teachers are specifically asked about how to handle differences in learning capacity among students – which may be one good reason for the high priority seemingly given to this subject matter in teacher interviews. Two components are often referred to in teachers' narratives about their typical handling strategy: (1) Their categorization of individual students as *either* strong *or* weak learners should not be discernible to the students – for ethical reasons or for fear of making self-fulfilling prophecies (Pygmalion effect)? (2) Generally speaking they direct most of their 'teaching energy' to students assumed to be weak learners/low achievers – but in such a way that their strategic intention will go unnoticed by the students. When students describe their peer-learning practices they often refer to the said distinction as a simple fact of life. Apparently they do not feel the need to make the distinction a secret.

In one other teacher quote mutual peer-learning is rather described as an instrument for favoring ZOPED, namely by catering for the special learning needs of students whom the teacher labelled as introvert, equaling perhaps what students themselves call 'shy' or even 'fearful':

*How much ever the teacher is friendly, some students are introvert and for them I think it will help. They will be able to talk with their friend and tell them to teach. Usually I practice this in 9e as they are more introvert. When I teach them and get vague answer, I tell them to get into pairs as the class is already divided into pairs(sitting arrangement)i.e. one good and one weak and tell them to learn from each other as what one knows, other may not know. This way, I also motivate them.*  
(102)

The mutual peer-learning theme is much more sparingly commented upon by teachers than by students. As always, this may simply reflect the fact that interviewers didn't explicitly ask teacher interviewees for such comments. Given the importance attached to the theme by students, we suggest that mutual peer-learning be made

subject to future systematic scrutiny – as a possible way of furthering true student-centeredness in Bhutanese classrooms.

#### **4. Stakeholders vary widely in their expressed value-based commitment to school life and educational policy**

Parents definitely figure as the most important stakeholder group in this section<sup>12</sup>. This is reasonable given that they have hardly received any attention at all in previous sections. Expressions of teachers' and students' 'value-based commitment to school life and educational policy' is mainly presented as being either similar or dissimilar to those of parents.

##### **4.1 The parents as a stakeholder group – composed by sub-groups**

Generally speaking parents, as interviewees, talk about and take an interest in school life and educational matters in a society-centered perspective. Education is a civic duty – a necessary requirement for dealing with challenges of the upcoming society:

*We have to give importance to education; it is sole bread earner and future for us. So education is must. Whatever government is doing at least till class twelve is also good thing. (405)*

In a more personal vein parents put tremendous emphasis on school as vehicle for their child's success – or lack of success – in a competitive society. Education is not only a civic duty, it is also seen as the only way for their children to get a life better than the parents:

*Because I did not get the opportunity to study, I encourage my children to study. I tell them that they have to work hard. (205)*

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12 Cf. documents 109, 205, 305, 405, 505

The parents of our sample may conveniently be divided into three sub-groups. One parent subgroup expresses general satisfaction with everything pertaining to school life (109): His/her own child is doing well. Apart from the fact that some teachers at lower class-levels are somewhat inexperienced, he/she has no complaints. This interviewee is one of the relatively few educated parents in our sample.

Interviewees belonging to one other subgroup (305, 405) may express contentment as far as their own child's scholastic achievements are concerned, and also gratitude to the state for providing education free of charge. At the same time, however, they volunteer strong negative attitudes towards what they view as school culture's morally destructive impact on Bhutanese youth. First and foremost teachers' leniency/friendliness, as opposed to strictness is targeted as problematic. The banning of corporeal punishment is said to have been introduced 30-40 years too early. Sex education and even GNH (mentioned by one parent; 305) is described as unhealthy in a national, cultural-developmental perspective.

*The worry and the personal feeling, these days I see lot of students getting spoilt, this may be because they have the freedom. It could be because of introduction of sex education subject in the school. I feel it could be because of that, or parents fault or teachers/education fault. (... ) Our time it was very different, we used feel awkward to talk with anyone. Now we see boys and girls walk freely and openly. Are parents not taking care of such things, it could be parents fault. (... ) If you look from one angle, I might look conservative but that way I feel children are getting spoilt. So whether it is the fault of parents or from the education system that is my concern. (405)*

Most often attitudes of the above-described variety are given unambiguous expression. One parent may be quoted as being more ambivalent:

*That time [i.e. during my school days] strictness was there. May be due to fear ... we studied. When I compare our time*

*... and today ... I would say our time was better. But there are improvement in other things ... children possess forwardness, they do not fear anyone. (405)*

On a much more modest scale parents from this sub-group may also criticize the school 'technically' for sub-optimal achievements in a pedagogical sense:

*If you look here in this school many qualified and experienced teachers are handling lower class and teacher without any experiences are teaching in class X. So I feel there is a mismatch and this could be the administration fault. (...) If I blame teacher they are guided by the policy and syllabus. So I feel if the system is rectified properly, then school, teachers and students will do well. (305)*

Our third subgroup (205, 505) consists of uneducated parents of underachieving children – for whom school seems basically to represent a world from which they feel estranged. One parent describes her lack of contact with school and teachers and comments like this on her children's lack of scholastic success:

*I am sometimes shy and other times scared. (...) [The children] are all hardworking but I guess it's my karma that they are not doing very well in studies. (205)*

## **4.2 Teachers and students as stakeholder groups**

As a natural function of the way they were interviewed teachers mainly talk about school life from a professional, classroom-centered perspective. *Eye contact with teacher* paves the way for meaningful, efficient teaching and productive participation in classroom and group activities

Teachers are also aware of social conditions playing a role in motivation of the students. If students have problems at home, are tired or hungry it will influence the motivation of the students:

*Sometimes I go near the student and ask them whether he/she is sick or whether he/she had breakfast/lunch or any personal problem he/she has.*

Some teachers support parents' perspective by talking to the student about the expectations from their families. Thus the just quoted, socially sensitive teacher continues like this:

*If the child says no, I tell them to pay attention as it is very important and at the same time it is very competitive and I tell them the expectation their parents have for them. (ibid)*

In the following quote, students obligations towards their parents are emphasized even more forcefully:

*I talk about their family and motivate them by telling that their parents must be having lots of expectation from them and put your heart and soul as your parents are really suffering and so you are supposed to think twice and study. I even quote them the example whether they wanted to carry basket and walk by the side of the road or you want to drive. I ask them which one they would prefer. The ultimate goal is to study hard. (102)*

Whenever students talk in general terms about their experiences as school-goers, they express personal enjoyment – as, for example in the following interview exchange:

***Are you happy in the school?***

*Yes (chorus)*

***Why are you happy in the school?***

*Student 1: Lots of friends.*

*Student 2: We are happy in the school because in the school we have different kind of people. Some are with funny characters. When we meet with them, they crack jokes. We forget all our problems. So, I think school is the best place. (507)*

## 5. Theoretical discussion

It is interesting to note that many of the students' evaluative remarks concerning teaching style or methodology correspond closely to ideas on which PBL-inspired pedagogy (Problem-Based Learning) are based. This coincidence becomes even more interesting, given that Samtse Educational College, as part of Royal University of Bhutan, has in fact expressed a wish that their collaboration with Aalborg University may involve PBL-related issues.

Our data material clearly demonstrates a pronounced diversity among students. Some have educated parents while others are children of non-educated parents; many, but not all live in rural areas where passage to and from school presents difficulties. These and other differences necessarily impact how the individual student experiences school and how his/her parents are able to support them. Looking at cultural factors some obvious challenges also appear: The Bhutanese school system is in a transition phase moving from a range of traditional approaches to teaching towards a more open approach as a consequence of the official policy about *Educating for GNH*. This seems to be challenging students as well as their parents, some of the teachers and principals.

According to Illeris (2009), learning takes place in the interplay between primarily three important factors; 1) students' efforts in acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes as mental processes and based on background factors of social and cultural character ; 2) process drivers such as motivation , volition, maybe fear; 3) interaction factors, primarily involving (in the classroom setting) teachers: student-teacher relations, and fellow students (peers): student-student relations.

Illeris' theoretical framework operates at an abstract-descriptive level and uses a broad range of theories as its means for locating factors of central significance for learning processes. The all-important message emanating from this theoretical framework is that learning should never be looked at only from one, supposedly all-encompassing perspective, but always from multiple perspectives. Acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes happen by a combination of stu-

dents' cognitive processes, driven by wishes to learn and in collaboration with others and in safe environments (Illeris 2009, Ramsden 2003). This process can be initiated and supported through a vast amount of different teacher styles and teacher- student relationships.

Our data material shows that teaching in Bhutanese classrooms typically takes place in a sequence of events where presentation from teacher is followed by student activities, as roughly sketched below:

- Teacher provides explanation on the topic
- Students solve the problems given by the teacher, which the students are supposed to solve based on the information given by the teacher.
- Students are handpicked by the teacher to demonstrate how the problem was solved by them to the whole class. The teacher supplements the student's inputs (feedback) wherever required. (201)

This approach will vary, but in principle it is the way in which much teaching takes place – you may hear the term 'spoon feed' mentioned quite often. As didactic format, it definitely leads to learning, but the approach is first and foremost managed as an expression of teacher's professional assessment of what needs to be done, and how. Student-based curiosity, values and interests have no great share in shaping the process as it moves along. Even if students are active, their activity patterns are, so to speak, choreographed by the teacher.

One problem embedded in the described didactic format is that the best students be those picked by the teacher, while other, less gifted students may be left with fewer possibilities for learning the relevant stuff. Their self-understanding related to the student role may tell them they are 'no good'.

Our data material shows that some teachers do apply the term student-centeredness to activities that engage students in other ways than simply listening to and hopefully interiorizing the teacher's messages:

*Student learnt much and they feel alert and they learn by doing... student they learn a lot by themselves... a day might be a fruitful one. (302)*

Such an understanding of student-centeredness, focusing on students being active, and interactive rather than passive, seems to correspond with Boud's (2001) notions about peer learning.

Another way of facilitating learning, which takes place, is through collaborative activities where the students work together and solve tasks in pairs or in groups. In our data material we find some teachers expressing somewhat skeptical attitudes towards this didactic method. There can be many reasons for doing this. Based on didactic understanding you cannot always just use one specific teaching form in all situations, for instance if students are not prepared for this collaborative approach teachers have to take into consideration how to teach them to act in these kinds of teaching and learning forms. Another factor is that teachers by using these kinds of teaching forms have to believe in and thrust, and also to signal in body language to students that they believe that the students can do it (the Pygmalion effect).

Rogers (1983), Hattie (2013) and Ramsden (2003) focus on the importance of student-teacher relationships and emphasize the importance of teachers being able to open up and be kind to students, but at the same time be very transparent with regard to expectations (formal learning goals and resources). The teacher's approach to students' motivation affects the quality of education, where feelings like fear are believed to affect learning negatively. The following statement covers many teachers' view on student motivation:

*As a teacher you should have respect from the student but not fear. Looking at the way we address the students and the words we use to the student, sometimes we have the tendency to criticize them and that needs to be improved. I guess such improvement will also be helpful to their learning. (307)*

The data material shows a combination of teaching driven by syllabus and teaching characterized by the Zone for Proximal Development (ZOPED, Vygotsky 1978). In general, and provided they know in which direction they have to go, students definitely prefer studying without the interference of teachers.

Regarding students view on *the pedagogically optimal teacher-learner relationship*, students' responses generally express a definite unity, even though personal preferences vary somewhat. Generally speaking, the teacher most favored by the students is the frank or friendly grown-up who invites students into a person-to-person encounter. The optimal teacher-learner relationship occurs, referring to the students, when this frank and friendly person also manages the teaching task in a professionally efficient manner.

Also some reservation is noticed,

*I want them to be a little strict, because I saw many students taking advantage of them although I cannot raise my voice in class and say that (he) or she is doing this or that. (111)*

Viewed from a perspective based on our data material combined with the theoretical frameworks about learning and about the importance of the didactics, the quality of teaching seems to be developing in a new and more professional didactic direction, not least initiated by the policy of *Educating for GNH* and more teacher education. Teachers as well as principals and students definitely do a lot of qualified reflection about how to achieve optimal quality of teaching learning. At the same time – but not to be wondered at – doubts and some confusion among respondents are also voiced. From the perspective of teachers, newly enacted syllabus reforms together with large numbers of students in their classes make it difficult for them to handle students in as personally differentiated manner as they would wish.



## PART IV: FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN THE SCHOOLS<sup>13</sup>



Formative assessment has a positive impact on students' learning by increasing their motivation (Black & Wiliam 1998). The single student's motivation is crucial for learning to take place in any educational setting. In general, students' eager participation in the classroom activities depend much upon whether the teaching style being practiced appeals to their experience and motivation. Learning for them

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13 This part of our research project is rendered more fully in Karma Utha's Ph.D. dissertation (Utha 2015), including chapters on the theoretical framework and theoretical discussion of the empirical findings in addition to recommendations of amendments. In the briefer presentation of some of the same empirical material and analysis, the present book part on formative assessment contains points and text pieces that are identical with some of the contents of the Ph.D. dissertation.

is not based so much on what is taught but how things are taught. Wiliam has stated the matter very clearly:

*The greatest impact on learning is the daily lived experiences of students in classrooms, and that is determined much more by how teachers teach than by what they teach. (2011, p. 13)*

Formative assessment is also known as 'assessment for learning' and as the ongoing dialogue to make explicit the learning that actually takes place in the classroom (Black et al. 2003; Marshall 2015). It comprises four different classroom practices each of which evidently has the motivating potential due to a close interplay with the students' experience: question-answer events, self-assessment, peer assessment, and feedback. After looking upon the research and theoretical understanding of these practices of formative assessment, it will be pointed out that this dialogical approach to learning and assessment has a profound historical basis in pedagogical theory, namely in Vygotsky's concept of the 'zone of proximal development', which has been further develop not least by Griffin & Cole (1984), Engeström (1987) and Tharp & Gallimore (1988). Furthermore, the point of associating to the students' experience and motivation leads back to Dewey's understanding of learning.

For effective learning, the student must be certain that the classroom setting is a safe place in which to learn. The learner's self-confidence must be build up through question-answer processes that allow for trials and mistakes. This takes time for the students to reflect and go wrong, which is often eliminated through 'closed questions' with only one correct answer, avoiding the dialogue that might uncover the nature of misconceptions among the students. Learning through events and processes of question-answer dialogue only happens by letting the learners take risks, make mistakes, and learn from the mistakes. Teachers on their part need to be skillful in han-

dling the student's incorrect response to minimize the stress level and at the same time encourage further learning.<sup>14</sup>

Self-assessment<sup>15</sup> and peer assessment<sup>16</sup> aid the student to assess his or her own work and that of others. This helps the students to be more responsible for their own learning as well as their peers' learning. Gradually they come to understand the assessment process that a teacher undertakes and use this knowledge to further plan the course of their learning. However, a note of caution is also adequate on the basis of the research findings on such practices. For both self- and peer assessment to have a positive impact on learning, students have to be trained to undertake such practices<sup>17</sup>. Also, training alone is not sufficient. A student trained in undertaking self-assessment is not going to be proficient overnight. To be knowledgeable and skillful in this field, practice is required by the students. Teachers on their side should have patience to help develop this knowledge and skills in their students. Research findings indicate that over time students show improvement to rate their work as well as their peer's work.

The influence of feedback on learning is very powerful, yet, the impact it has can be positive as well as negative. According to Hattie and Timperley, feedback is

*...most effective when it aids in building cues and information regarding erroneous hypothesis and ideas and then leads to the development of more effective and efficient strategies for processing and understanding the material . (2007, p. 102)*

The appropriate form of feedback focuses on the particular answer or interpretation, not on the student's broader stance<sup>18</sup>. It results in higher confidence and greater investment of effort by the learners.

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14 Cf. Black et al. 2003; Black & Wiliam 1998; Rowe 1986; Walsh & Sattes 2005.

15 Cf. Andrade & Valtcheva 2009; Bingham, Holbrook & Meyers 2010; Sluijsmans et al. 1999.

16 Cf. Boud, Cohen & Sampson 1999; Topping 2009, 2010.

17 Cf. Black et al. 2003; Black & Wiliam 2005; Clarke 2005; van Zundert et al. 2010..

18 Cf. Black & Wiliam 1998, 2005; Hattie & Timperley 2007; Kulhavy 1977.

On the other hand, when feedback consists of general praise, it is rarely found to be effective. For the feedback to be effective,

*...it needs to be clear, purposeful, meaningful, and compatible with students' prior knowledge and to provide logical connections. (Hattie & Timperley 2007, p. 104)*

Like in self- and peer assessment, providing and receiving feedback requires students and teachers to have skills in doing that.

Vygotsky has suggested a now well-known explanation of a learner's developmental processes and learning. With him, we come to understand that developmental processes do not coincide with learning processes. In fact, the developmental process is found to lag behind the learning process resulting in the ZPD. The ZPD is the distance between a learners' actual developmental level and the potential developmental level which can be achieved with some assistance from an adult or peer. Vygotsky explains that for learning to be effective, we should not plan learning in the developmental level that a learner has already reached as it doesn't lead to a new stage of developmental process. Learning has to be planned to take place always ahead of a learner's actual level of development in the ZPD. In a class, all the students mayn't have the same actual level of development. Steiner and Souberman, in their afterword in 'Mind in society' state:

*...many educators, recognizing that the rate of learning may vary from child to child, isolate particularly "slow learners" from their teachers as well as their peers through the use of programmed and frequently mechanized instruction. (Steiner & Souberman in Vygotsky 1978, p. 131)*

Since Vygotsky considers learning as a social process, he emphasizes use of social interaction between teacher-student or between student and a more capable peer to help learning to take place. The use of scaffolding by teachers to move learning forward in the ZPD

is also encouraged by other researchers like Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976).

The main theory underpinning the study of formal assessment is Dewey's experiential theory. His theory of experience resulted from critical discussion of two extremes of education: traditional and progressive education. The traditional education is described as teacher centric with structured syllabus that focuses on content delivery. On the other hand progressive education is described as a free approach to education. He emphasizes that education based on a sound theory of experience results from combination of two principles - continuity and interaction. He stresses on the necessity for the teachers to understand and build on the students' past experiences to help learning to take place. However, he also admits that it is easier for the teachers dealing with the young learners in preprimary or primary schools to determine the range of past experiences and find those activities that connect with the experiences. Yet, with older learners, it becomes more difficult for the teachers:

*It is harder to find out the background of the experience of individuals and harder to find out just how the subject-matters already contained in that experience shall be directed so as to lead out to larger and better organized fields. (Dewey 1938, p. 75)*

But, he goes further to conclude:

*What we want and need is education pure and simple, and we shall make surer and faster progress when we devote ourselves to finding out just what education is and what conditions have to be satisfied in order that education may be a reality and not a name or a slogan. (ibid, p. 91)*

## **1. The course of the analysis**

Our analysis of formative assessment (FA) in the case studies was carried out through the following phases. First, we read very care-

fully the five first reported cases to note the recurrent themes to be found concerning FA. In order to produce a comprehensible result of our detailed analysis, it was decided to look for the approximately five themes that each of us regarded as the most significant as well as frequent in the material. Then, the suggested themes were discussed for clarification and to avoid overlapping. The themes were formulated preliminarily in six statements, which we could confidently recognize as interesting and solid findings across the documentation of the case studies. The following six statements were the outcome of this part of our analysis:

1. The notion of FA is marked by obscurity due to divergent conceptions
2. FA is sustained with divergent attitudes
3. FA influences the quality of learning
4. Social relations and motivation are formative features of particular relevance to assessment
5. The topic of 'the formative' indicates the students' position as an early generation in the modern system of education
6. FA requires time and resources that often seem to be unavailable

Each of these six statements was explicated in a one page text consisting of subthemes together with a few lines of additional clarification to every subtheme and to the statement. On the basis of this intermediate product of the analysis, we proceeded simultaneously in two different directions: detailed documentation and overall clarification.

On the one hand we went back to the case study documentation to pinpoint the places in which the singular subtheme under each statement appeared. This led to an important analytical index of references for the six statements and their subthemes, which (in its revised and final version) is included as appendix A.

On the other hand the six statements and their subthemes were considered more closely in order to clarify our overall interpretation of the results of the FA analysis. It was noticed that statements 1 and

2 focus closely on how FA *per se* is perceived and practiced, while statements 3 and 4 are about how FA relates to quality of learning and education, and statements 5 and 6 illuminate how FA coheres with (i.e. influences on and is influenced by) broader institutional circumstances. This led to certain reformulations and rearrangements among the statements and subthemes.

Our analyses concerning the two first statements were compound and call for a remark about the changes of perspective that took place during the process. The case studies were designed to investigate how the concept of FA (as conceived in the research literature) is understood and applied in practice within the Bhutanese schools. Quickly, it was clear that our research aim was marked by an implicit disparity: In the research literature FA is commonly outlined as consisting of question-answer interplay, feedback to the students, self-assessment, peer-assessment, and formative use of summative assessment. In the Bhutanese school practice, however, the notion of FA is obviously more associated with concepts of continuous assessment or summative assessment. Initially these reflections served to make us attentive to differences between, on the one hand the high pedagogical esteem typically attributed to FA, on the other hand the much more pragmatic ways of practicing it that was evident in our data material. Later, it has become clear to us that the particular contrast inherent in the very notion of FA has decisive pedagogical importance for what goes on in the case study schools: whether FA is regarded as just a kind of assessment, or first and foremost a formative pedagogical intervention. In the empirical material this ambiguity is strongly testified in two ways: as mixtures of formative and summative functions, and in the managerial rather than student-centered character of FA. Finally, we realized that besides this ambiguity associated with the way FA is practised, the empirical material also elucidates interesting aspects concerning the research literature's concept of FA.

After the preliminary report on our investigation of FA, delivered at the beginning of 2014, an additional sequence of data gathering and analysis was undertaken including transcriptions from two further case studies in Drugyegang and Zengang, Karma Utha's

interviews with educational officers and more detailed follow-up studies in Yoeseltse and Gedu. The analyses of this material led to a revision of the explication of sub-themes which follows below. Certain adjustments were also made in the formulation of the main theme statements, which indicate the principal results of our analysis:

1. The notion of FA is marked by ambiguity
2. Some crucial methods of FA are poorly established
3. FA influences the quality of learning
4. Social relations and motivation are formative features of particular relevance to assessment
5. The topic of 'the formative' is associated with the modern system of education
6. FA requires time and resources that often seem to be unavailable

## **2. The notion of formative assessment is marked by ambiguity**

In the studied schools, the conceptual understanding of formative assessment appears to be quite obscure. Different understandings exist and some of these notions differ from the theoretical concept. Furthermore, the idea of formative assessment is largely overshadowed and distorted by a general emphasis on summative assessment practices.

The empirical material points out three distinct practices that highlight the obscurity about formative assessment:

- First, practices of summative assessment – where marks are given without any formative feedback – are often described as formative assessment.
- Secondly, formative assessment is conceived as nothing more than practices of continuous assessment.
- Thirdly, the formative assessment is perceived more as a managerial tool for teachers and school administration rather than as a practice form aimed at promoting the students' learning.

## 2.1 Mix-up of formative and summative functions

In situations where formative assessment was supposed to take place, practices of summative assessment are often prevailing. The main emphasis is on giving marks and not on learning. The following two teacher statements – and many more could be added – illustrate this:

*My understanding is that formative and summative assessment are done together. Using formative assessment as a diagnostic tool doesn't work well. Also formative assessment gives us problems, because we are not well trained in formative assessment practices. We are more at home with summative than with formative assessment. (406-15)*

*To be honest not all teachers follow the guidelines properly. That's where formative assessment becomes a great failure. When it comes to practice teachers do summative assessments. This may not be true of everybody, but too many of us do like that. (...) Here in this part of the world formative assessment means giving students marks. (308-124)*

Elsewhere in the interview, the number two quoted teacher expands on the theme of 'this part of the world' as follows:

*Teachers are being misled the assessment term itself is misleading. In our Bhutan context assessment means giving marks. In the West they use a different terminology and we have borrowed that when we talk about our own practice. So that is why in our context the formative aspect doesn't count. (308-145)*

The emphasis on mark giving as dominant assessment practice is also apparent from the importance given to weekly tests. In different schools they carry different names, such as class test, unit test etc. Below we deal extensively with test practice as it was implemented in one case study school where it was particularly strongly emphasized.

In this school, every Monday, right after the morning assembly, i.e. first period of the class, the school has a practice of conducting a test in one particular subject. The result of this test is made public by putting it up on the notice board where it stays for a week's time. In addition, the performances of all the classes are compared and the peak performers as well as the lowest performing classes are announced during the morning assembly. When the researcher questioned the reason behind such practice to the school administrator, this response followed:

*One group of very active teachers, who are also very concerned about their students' academic achievement, they were conducting such test, not only on weekly basis, sometimes twice a week. Another group hardly ever conducted such tests even on a monthly basis. We started our Monday tests in order to make sure that testing happens in all subjects on a uniform basis. Certain teachers from the first-mentioned group, they keep on conducting tests even in between the shared weekly tests. One other purpose behind this strategy is to make sure students are academically focused at least once every week. Children are here to study the academic material, but in reality other things occupy them mentally – today maybe cultural activities, tomorrow sports, day after tomorrow book reading. In that way, their academic focus is weakened. Thus, our Monday tests are meant to ensure that our children, at least once in a week, have a clear academic focus, and by using Monday we further intend to make our children use their weekends properly and not just whiling away their time. From parents we are getting feedback saying that they find it useful their children do some studying during weekends. (516-27)*

Not only the administrator, but also several students from this school found that the Monday tests were a good idea. One teacher, however, argued that the arrangement put too much stress on students and he would prefer some other arrangement:

*Do you think this weekly test is having an impact on students' learning?*

*Impact I think is there, but personally some other way of doing the tests. Before we had block test, I liked them better.*

*How is this block test different from the weekly test you have now?*

*For every subject we were asked to do two block test within a semester. Monday tests are stressful for students because they happen every week and students may feel obliged to spend their Sundays studying. The block test we had earlier allowed them to find study at their own convenience. I liked that better.*

## **2.2 Misconception of formative assessment as continuous assessment**

Among teachers formative assessment is often understood as nothing more than continuous assessment. Formally speaking, continuous assessment relates to classwork, homework, project work, and class test. By making the two assessment form equivalent, the formative aspects are 'forgotten'. The difference between formative and summative assessment becomes a matter of frequency, the former being done more often than the latter. According to one teacher, this understanding is in accord with the official handbook definitions.

*Whenever we ask questions about differences between formative and summative assessment, we shall search for answers in the guide book given by the policy makers. Here it is clearly stated that formative assessment is homework, class work and project work. (308-148)*

When the described, prevalent teachers' view is discussed with a district education official, his immediate understanding matched that of the teachers:

*Even I thought it is like that. Formative assessment is supposed to happen throughout the year whereas summative assessment*

*is normally reserved for terminal examinations. ... My understanding was that 'formative assessment' indicated that it happened on a continuous basis. (801-146)*

The misconception dealt with here was not universal. The teacher quoted below expresses a clear understanding of the pedagogical essence in formative assessment, namely learning-enhancing feedback to the student:

*Giving marks is in itself not formative assessment, but summative. If marks shall be used in a formative way, we have to give comments. By passing through the comments students will understand where they have gone wrong and what are the things that need doing. Instead of just giving marks and doing an overall performance rating, the teacher has to be engaged in the process. (404-118)*

Such an understanding is, however, comparatively rare in our empirical material. Indeed when formative assessment is understood simply as continuous assessment, this sometimes leads to an even stronger misconception where formative assessment is construed as a procedure that may jeopardize the educational system's capacity to do properly objective quality control on individual students: teacher's informal evaluation of weaker students may give these an advantage in terms of passing exams. The idea that formative assessment shall contribute to students' learning recedes into the background. This viewpoint is expressed in the following quote from a school administrator:

*I must admit that I am totally against this continuous assessment. In my student days my academic assessment was rated by placing me somewhere between 0% and 100%. Today in fact we are compromising with the quality. In classes four and five, written exam accounts for 50 %, other 50% are based on continuous assessment. A student with a 50-score in exam and 40 continuous assessment must be promoted to the next class.*

*(...) Poor student can do their formative assessment tasks by copying from their friends. The person who copy may even get the highest marks. That's why I don't find these assessment forms constructive. (306-116)*

According to our data, viewing formative assessment as being more or less identical to continuous assessment is a commonly held belief among teachers, principals and district education officials. Interviews with the education officials who are involved in developing the curriculum and monitoring the school education showed that they seem to be well aware of the prevalence of this problematic misconception. According to one education official:

*The confusion is still around. We regularly tell teachers that formative assessment is about probing students' understanding or putting questions: have they understood or not. But teachers seem to feel that it is simply a question answer technique. Whenever we say 'formative assessment', they reply as if we're just talking about continuous assessment. (803-42)*

Another education official explains how they, during school visits related to *the Performance Management System*, try to ensure that formative assessment is included in teaching-learning activities:

*Yes, we go and visit. We do classroom observation. We go through students' notebooks and see how feedback has been provided by the teachers. Sometimes if the students get it wrong, teacher will simply make a cross, nothing else. We encourage teachers to provide feedback telling the student what was wrong and how to correct it. That for me is doing formative assessment. So, this is done every once in a year?  
Actually we visit twice a year, once in the beginning and once later. (803-114)*

## 2.3 The managerial function of assessment

Even if teachers may be aware that formative assessment aims at somehow improving students' learning, when it comes to practice, the focus is more on following a format based on simple objective criteria like "was the work completed on time?, handwriting neatness, submission date etc. Managerial control becomes more important than providing feedback to improve learning. A teacher in a focus group highlights this practice:

*I think we have developed a format, or rather different formats for different subjects, telling us how to do the assessment throughout the year. Format components are like CW, HW, portfolio, their attendance, their participation, timely submission of their work, maintaining cleanliness as and how well they translate technical terms into their own words. Formative assessment is made up of all these components put together becomes. (404-103)*

The following teacher's quote from another school tells more or less the same story. Based on whether criteria are fulfilled or not, marks are awarded or deducted:

*I have criteria. When I correct and evaluate classroom work, I have to look at the accuracy, clarity of presentation, etc. Accuracy adds one mark, other quality items may get two. In classroom work we include participation, but participation is absent in home work. If I ask them to submit homework on 21<sup>st</sup>, and they are late, then marks will be deducted. We have a whole system of different rating steps. (202-66)*

As was already discussed in the earlier thematic section a tension may be experienced between the learning-enhancing intent of formative assessment and the (managerial) task of doing summative measurements of students' performance. These issues make the

principal quoted below express preference for a weekly test arrangement like the 'Monday arrangement' described earlier.

*As a principal I consider summative or exam orientation to be preferable. Children's performance should be assessed purely based on exam. By having a weekly test and also monthly tests, we shall know that these students are doing well and these others need attention. Teachers won't have to wait for this information for a half or a whole year. So I do think that instead of awarding marks for class work and home work – which may be invalid, because the student may have copied from someone – a test system would be more effective. But I also think most schools have dropped weekly tests thinking they are too time-consuming. (306-129)*

Our interviews, most importantly with school principals, contain a number of, sometimes quite elaborate descriptions of quality monitoring system that oblige teachers to submit their lesson plans to the heads-of-department (HOD), HOD then submit departmental lesson plan to the vice-principals, who in turn submit to principal. No provisions for systematic feedback were described as part of such systems.

### **3. Some crucial methods of formative assessment are poorly established**

As has been pointed out, the prevailing practical notion, i.e. ways of *talking about* formative assessment tend to be associated with marks rather than with students' learning. Yet, classroom observation as well interviews tell us that formative assessment practices do indeed take place. Practices in accord with the theoretical notions of formative assessment are many times observable in the teaching and learning process in the classrooms. But since these practices are not clearly recognized by the teachers as formative assessment, they also often remain poorly established. Our observations on this topic can be specified in relation to each of the themes usually associated with

the theoretical concept of formative assessment: questioning, peer assessment, self-assessment, and feedback.

### 3.1 Questioning

Dialogue in the form of question-answer is found to be the most frequent form of formative assessment taking place in the classroom as is evident from several classroom observations like this one:

*Class assessment is done through questioning and answering.  
(301-20)*

When interviewed, many teachers also mention question-answer as their most practiced form of assessment. This is evident from the following focus group interview with teachers:

*So questioning is a normal assessment practice for you?*

*Teacher 1: Yes, because I don't see any better way of doing it. Maybe in future, but at the moment I feel this is the best.*

*Teacher 2: I agree. We ask questions to tell whether students have understood or not. (...)*

*Teacher 3: Same here. Questioning is one method most often used, not only by the three of us but by most teachers ... (518-58)*

When used as formative assessment questioning is a means for finding out whether the teaching contents have been understood or not. The following teacher quote describes the procedure as it is found in many classrooms:

*To check whether learning objectives are fulfilled or not we usually ask questions at the end of our input to class. Sometimes we ask them to write and sometimes we ask questions for here and now-answers. If most students show understanding, we use the majority as indication that objectives are fulfilled. We*

*can never guarantee that our objectives are 100% fulfilled.*  
(212-66)

The focus of questioning is most often related to facts and to demonstrating recall of what has been taught. This shows in the below quote from a classroom observation where students are frequently found to give chorus answer:

*Teacher asked short questions in between, such as “Are there like terms? – Are these two answers matching? – Are you getting me?” The students were giving chorus answer, all the time saying “yes sir”. Then the teacher informed the student to do rest of question 1 as home work.*

*The teacher then went through the same process with question 2. (213-34)*

According to the literature redirecting, prompting, and giving clues are important aspect of questioning, if done with a formative intent. These aspects are found to receive insufficient attention. Lack of time is repeatedly cited as reason for that. As shown in the quote below they may even be seen as a waste of:

***Does your hectic schedule allow you enough time for these technical aspects of questioning? Are they practised in reality?***

*Teacher 1: Well, according to the lesson plan, we always have to introduce topics. But then to be frank, the closure part is not done properly because, as you said yourself, time management becomes a problem. We think of the answers we get as simply coming from the students, but we fail to consider the differences between the low achievers and the high achievers. If we direct questions to some of the lower achievers, then our efforts to try and get the correct answer may take lot of time, and we don't have that time.*

*Teacher 2: We may redirect and redirect and try to rephrase the question, and again redirect. When we do that, some questions*

*get twisted and turned around so many times and that becomes a waste of our time. (404-45)*

The following quote comes from a teacher who is more persistent in her efforts to engage 'low achievers' in question-answer practices.

*What I sometime do is I try to stop those bright students from speaking first. When I give the question, they'll try to give the answer. Earlier that would make me think that those who are not so bright had also understood. Later I found out from their written homework and classwork that there is a drastic difference between the two groups. That has made me say directly to the bright ones, if you know the answer, please hold yourself back when I ask a question. If they bring out the answer then I think, yes, everything is fine, I can move on. ... Yet, sometimes I have to ask those bright people. If you keep holding them back, then they might lose interest. (202-111)*

The time pressure leads many teachers to volunteer the answers themselves, as illustrated by the following classroom observations:

In the first half of the lesson, the teaching was more teacher centered though in the process of explanation, some questions were asked. In some cases correct answers were given and the respective students were given due reinforcement like 'very good' and 'excellent'. However, when correct answers were not given, other students didn't get the opportunity to give answer. Instead the students were informed that time is very short and teacher provided the correct explanation. An example:

*Teacher: 'What about the other difference?'*

*Student gave the wrong answer*

*Teacher: 'Sorry that is wrong. I will explain. Time is short.'*

*The teacher then gave the answer.*

*Teacher: 'Why should we make the bottom part of the hydrometer bulky?'*

*Students were quiet for some time and then one student gave the answer which was wrong.*

*Teacher: 'Ok, I will explain'.*

*This practice was repeated for some more questions. (509-34)*

The above practice where teacher often gives the answers themselves seems to have passed on to the students as observed during the classroom observation where students in groups were having class presentation:

*The floor was open for question answer session but nobody was asking any question. The presenter then asked one question to the students to which everybody was murmuring but no answer was forth coming. The presenter then explained the answer himself.*

*The second presenter was a girl and she presented on phylum coelenterata. (...) In between her presentation, she asked time and again whether students had any questions. In some cases she asked the question to the students and when answer was not given, she explained herself:*

*Presenter : Do you know what aboral means?*

*Students: No*

*Presenter explained the answer. (511-34)*

As one variation on the question-answer practice, some teachers tick the names of responding students on their attendance sheet. The aim is to encourage student participation and these ticks are used as part of grading:

***This questioning also you are doing. Do you find this questioning important in teaching learning context?***

*(...) What I do is from the textbook and even I make my own question and ask. I paste the name list of the students on the front page of my lesson. I tick the names of whoever gives the right answer. I make sure students know why I am ticking. That it's a way of doing assessment.*

***Do you find this practice makes more students volunteer?***

*Yes, more volunteer and more become active. The effect carries over from one day to the next.*

***What if you told students it was not an assessment exercise, and just asked the question?***

*Nobody will volunteer, or only few. Some will be shy and then some will sit quietly. It was like that before and I have come up with this strategy. (210-171)*

Our classroom observation indicates that questioning most often takes place after the teacher has done the lesson input. One teacher gives the following explanation for such a practice:

*Obviously questions will be more effective at the because while teaching is going on, students' will concentrate on listening and on taking notes, copy what is being written on board. It would be a new task think about the teacher's questions. So during the teaching process assessment questions are not a good idea because students are otherwise engaged. When teacher has finished they can give their full attention to the question and bring up the answer. (518-97)*

### **3.2 Peer assessment**

Our empirical material suggests that peer assessment is mostly absent. We met many teacher's comments like this one:

*I don't know about other classes. As for me, I don't practice peer assessment. (502-73)*

When peer assessment does take place, it is usually associated with test paper correction and is mostly applied as a teacher controlled process. Students are involved in correcting peer's work based on the correct answer provided by the teacher. The following two teacher quotes exemplify this way of practicing peer assessment in class:

*When we do class test, then I'll give one student's paper to another person. Then I write down the correct answers on the board and they will tick. That's the only way I do peer assessment. (202-90)*

*Peer assessments I normally do in the class test, though not in tests where marks will be included in the final exam. I do these class tests to learn about their degree of understanding. After completing certain chapters, the tests are part of the classwork and I actually distribute test papers, e.g. from row one to four and so on, so nobody has their own paper. The correct answers will be written on the board. I dictate the marks from the students. (302-64)*

Similar practices are prevalent in all other case study schools. However, the feedback component, which is what gives to peer assessment its formative character, is observed to be missing in all the cases where teachers told about peer assessment practices:

*When I do it, classmates don't give feedback to each other. They just do the correction. (512-204)*

When the teachers' minimalistic practice of peer assessment was discussed with a principal, he provided an example of his own practice of peer assessment which, however, does not differ much from the habitual teachers' practice:

Some expressed reservations concerning peer assessment had to do with possible biases arising when it takes place between a weak student and better performing student. Better performing students are thought to be better in judging others' work compared to weak students. Such reservations form part of one teacher's reasons for not practising peer assessment:

*One very important reason why I don't do peer assessment has to do with fair, or rather, lack of fairness. Generally speaking students do not have full knowledge about what they are doing.*

*So peer will in any case not be completely fair. Further, if we look at levels of knowledge, some students are bright, some are not so bright, slow learners. Slow learners will assess less well than the bright ones. So uniformity will be not there. That's why I abstain from practicing it. (502-78)*

### **3.3 Self-assessment**

Self-assessment is weakly illuminated in the investigation. Further, the data material gives the impression that teachers' understanding of self-assessment is generally quite vague. In some cases, teachers explain the term as referring to their own self-assessment:

*Sometimes and in some areas I get the feeling that my students don't really seem to be learning. Is my approach to the students, my way of teaching the right one? Maybe there is a weakness? In that way I do self-assessment. (302-71)*

They may also explain it as finding out whether the students have done the assigned work in accord with the instruction given:

*We give certain steps for answering the questions correctly, writing on the board or through hand-outs. That way they may themselves assess whether they followed the steps correctly. (106-73)*

As a parallel to peer assessment practices described in the earlier section, self-assessment practice was sometimes associated with students' correcting their own test paper based on the correct answer provided by the teacher.

*Did you try self-assessment in your classroom? If yes, how did you try it?*

*Teacher 1: Yes, when we do spelling tests in class, most of the time I apply self-assessment. I write all the assessment on the board and I ensure that they do their own correction.*

*Teacher 2: I may present them with a question. They try to answer the questions. Then I set the criteria. Okay, this is how we are supposed to solve the problem. If they've used other procedures, I explain what mark they can get, and they award it themselves. Once they finish correcting I make them exchange the corrected papers with others . Then I solve the problem myself on the board. And then, because everybody knows about the criteria that need to be fulfilled, I ask everybody to see if those who have assessed their own work have been sincere or not. (404-129)*

Students understanding of self-assessment practice are not very different from the teachers:

*Sometime when teachers don't have time, they write the answer and tell us to correct ourselves. (217-300)*

*I thought this self-assessment practice is possible only in some subjects like maths because in this subject, there is only one particular answer to questions. But in case of some subjects, there are many answers. (217-314)*

School administrators' understanding of self-assessment appears to be in line with that of the teachers and the students.

A special case in our investigation concerns a group of teachers who, in their first interview round, explained that self-assessment practice was absent in their teaching practice since they felt (as was also said about peer assessment) that it would not be a fair assessment. These same teachers were interviewed again after about a year and they still gave the same answer. When the interviewer briefly explained the process involved in carrying out self-assessment, one from this teacher group first came up with the following reaction:

*I have understood self-assessment differently from what madam said. To me self-assessment was simply related to tests we do with the children. (...) This self-assessment you're talking*

*about is taking place on a continuous basis. It is on a long term practice and it needs time. For me it was simply about doing tests. Give them a test and let them assess their work. This was my thinking – but the kind of self-assessment you're talking about, I don't practice. I have never thought about self-assessment that way. And I can't really see myself doing it, first of all due to the time factor. It doesn't allow us. Second thing is coverage of syllabus. So, these two factors do not allow us to think about all those practices which require time. (510-224)*

During a later action research group session, however, the same teachers were more positive and showed enthusiasm for the idea of trying out both peer- and self-assessment in class:

*I think it is quite possible. It would be interesting to use this method also because students will be engaged and they would be more interested to hear from their own friends rather than every time from teacher teaching them. I think this is good idea. Maybe I will start with this concept of peer assessment. Even self-assessment I will try to use. In a time perspective such practices may even save teacher's time. Students want different method of teaching and this could be one strategy of generate interest. (518-223)*

### **3.4 Feedback**

Though the basic idea of formative assessment is closely associated with notions of 'feedback', the practices of formative assessment found in observed classrooms are not efficiently aimed at actively supporting students' learning, e.g. through giving useful advice. Teachers' feedback is mostly generic in nature as readily identified from the data:

*I provide comments like "good", "very good", "work hard" in their notebooks and class test. And during the class I correct responses that are not satisfactory. (204-24)*

*We may say “Your write-up could be cleaner... - Can be better ... - Drawing could be done the proper way ... “. If performance is correct, we say “This is the way you need to do – continue! - Excellent! Good!” We can even give marks on the student’s sheet itself. Later, marks are compiled and converted to whatever percentage is fitting. (404-114)*

Though the feedback is mostly generic in nature, the teachers agree that it enhances students’ learning. According to a teacher, the feedback not only helps improving student’s learning but also help them to make changes in their own instruction:

*My feedback tells me whether the students have understood the concept or not. Maybe I’ll simplify the information input next time I teach the concept. (204-27)*

Similar views are shared by other teachers as well. As to the students, some of them prefer both comments and marks. But, there are others who express that marks don’t indicate their actual level of learning:

*Student 1: because from grade we don’t know what teachers are trying to say.*

*Student 2: If they give comments we can improve. (111-77)*

Among parents teachers’ feedback is appreciated – partly on the background that a good number of teachers are found not correcting the students’ work.

*Parent 1: Some they check and give remarks. Others never check our children’s notebooks. As parents, we feel these teachers are either not interested or negligent on their duty.*

*Parent 2: I have seen remarks like “Your handwriting is not good, improve it”, we also see spelling being corrected. It does not matter whether they give good or bad remarks, but we feel all should check our children’s work, at the very least in their progress report. (305-83)*

In line with the parents comment, students mention that half the teachers in their school do not correct their work:

*Student 2: Some teachers are giving remarks, some are not giving. Some are simply giving tick. Some are not even correcting. (...)*

*Student 1: 50 percent teachers are giving, some are not giving. (407-40)*

Teachers, on their part, mention that time constraint makes them unable to correct every student's work and give feedback.

*Teacher 2: Correcting the work that students submit becomes a daunting task. So many pages are there and every page you have to read carefully.*

*Teacher 1: It is quite time consuming. (508-92)*

Some students differentiate between positive and negative remarks from teachers – and may express personal disapproval of the latter.

*One of you mentioned teachers may give bad remarks. Does this type of remark have negative impact on you? Do such comments affect your learning?*

*Student 1: No sir we like to improve.*

*Student 2: Yes sir, sometime I don't feel like improving.*

*How do you want your teacher to write the comment?*

*Student 3: It should be expressed in a good way. Some teachers are using harsh language. That's not good. (407-48)*

Similar issues were discussed among teachers – and mixed attitudes were expressed. Below two teachers belonging to the same focus group are quoted.

*Teacher 1: In a long term perspective positive feedback should be dominant. Negative, critical feedback may have short-term utility, but then it's a challenge to supplement always to sup-*

*plement with the positive aspect of things. As teachers we have to practice that. Even though it's a challenging task, we must analyze the student in a long-term perspective and give them positive reinforcement. So, that's what I try to do. Threats and the like should be avoided unless the student is exceptionally bad. Then I may be a little bit threatening. But my feedback is main positive. (508-80)*

*Teacher 2: I do both equally. At times the negative is called for. Thinking that they may get bad marks, they'll make an effort to perform better. (508-78)*

#### **4. Formative assessment influences the quality of learning**

Formative assessment serves as a bridge between how much students understand on their own and how much more they can understand with some help from teachers and peers. It helps learning by generating feedback information that is beneficial to both the teachers and the students. The result of formative assessment is then used to adjust teaching and learning process. In our data, we found three different ways in which practices of formative assessment thus promote quality learning: positive attitude to learning directed assessment, collaborative learning, and support of weak learners.

##### **4.1 Positive attitude towards the importance of formative assessment**

The formative assessment practice related to classwork, homework and project work aids students to better understand the concepts taught. Teachers in our case study were apt to express the idea that when students who do homework or classwork are helped to review and thereby to better remember the teaching contents:

*I think HW and CW do help. Learning material from the lesson is reviewed and put into writing. (...) Another advantage is*

*for the teachers: We get evidence that, yes, the children has learned. (504-83)*

*They get a chance to recollect whatever is taught. That way, it gives them more practice, more time to think about it. Their retention power increases and they will be able to do better in the test also, because the test may contain similar questions. (510-85)*

Teacher's verbal or written feedback to students' homework or classwork may bring further improvement to their learning. Here follow two teacher statements.

*Learning improves through feedback. the handwriting of one particular student was not good. Giving feedback helped. Feedback indicates that a mark will follow. Students become more careful. (102-60)*

*Feedback makes them more serious on it. They start working harder thinking that I will have to. if that kind of feeling develops good, learning-enhancing habits may evolve. (212-467)*

Above, we've heard students express general satisfaction with having their learning products receiving comments from teachers. In some cases comments lead them to revising and thereby improving these products.

*We write again. Do a new task solution and show it to the teacher. (207-51)*

This is an optimal consequence of feedback. Students and teachers may admit that, due to time constraint, students may not be in a position to work actively on the feedback received. One teacher puts it like this.

*The idea is that they should rework the material, but maybe because of some other workload, they may not be able to complete. But I think they try. (510-340)*

In so far as the student finds the time and energy to rework the material commented upon, the optimal sequence to that will be a renewed scrutiny from the teacher; cf. the following quote.

*Do you think students go through your comments?  
Yes, and as a follow up I use to check. (512-163)*

In cases where parents are educated, they are found to take the initiative to encourage their children to work on the feedback.

## **4.2 Collaborative learning**

In a collaborative learning setup, competition aspects of learning: “Who gets the highest marks?” – are in principle removed. Collaboration implies an openness within the student group to suggestions from other students. Thus, techniques and aspects of formative assessment will be naturally, and often in informal ways, embedded in this kind of learning. Teachers in the case study schools are time and again found to encourage learning from friends and classmates:

*Sometime, e.g. when students don't understand my teaching, I may ask them to discuss the topics presented with their friends. They can learn from their friends. I may even suggest a discuss within the entire class. (210-157)*

The advantages of peer leaning were also discussed at length in part III of this book – and we'll have more to say about it later in this part. Here follows one quote elaborating on the topic as seen from a student perspective.

*I feel uncomfortable with teacher. Friends are comfortable to us. With friends we can argue our points. We are at the same*

*level and we tend to find their mistakes. But if it's a teacher, even if we have some doubts in our mind, we hesitate to say those things. But with friends we can clear out any doubts and argue with them." (507-128)*

Discussions among friends may be organized as group work. Many students from our case study voice their preference for a group-based teaching style where they themselves and teacher are equally involved in the learning process.

*From my point of view, the teaching we most often prefer is one where teacher gives us presentation, then divides us into groups. Group works makes us learn more. (307-8)*

*Classroom activity should involve equal involvement of student and teachers. Not only the teachers. (307-20)*

Some teachers point out that group work doesn't always lead to active participation by every group member. Some students, e.g., may dominate the group discussion. In the following series of quotations, taken from two focus group interviews, teachers present ways in which they endeavor to raise the pedagogical quality of classroom-based group discussion:

*Well, I simply believe in having more groups with fewer students rather than few groups with more students. I preferably go for 8 to 10 groups in a class with roughly 4 members per group. The domination issue gets reduced that way. Some students who are reserved and shy, they don't feel comfortable to raise voice in a large group, but with just a few, it gets OK. (404-19)*

*I act as guide, but all activities are carried out by the students. But as a guide I can't stay with one group all the time. I have to visit different groups and ensure that the work that is given*

*to them is up to teacher's expectations. Students may go wrong if we don't guide and monitor the process. (404-28)*

*One may explicitly give the responsibility to the members or even to a group leader to guide the group, so that if teacher (...) is engaged with another group, the group leader or the group members take care of the group. Through this they also learn. (404-35)*

*One may also assign different group functions to different groups members. If maximum group size is 5 members, then one can be the manager, one can do the note-taking, one can be the presenter, etc. These different roles should not be permanent, but rather be changes among students. (404-38)*

*The very bright pupils are up in the front. During group activity, I never keep them in the front. When making groups I mix brighter with poorer students. (202-96)*

We do a round-up of this theme through one student's enthusiastic praise of group work as learning enhancing.

*I don't know how my friends here feel about it, but as for me, I find learning is best when teacher gives us group tasks. It is our responsibility to work things out, we learn more, we work harder. When teacher just teaches us, we just listen and then forget. But if questions we've dealt with in group work come up in exam, then we do remember the important points very clearly because we already discussed them in our group. (307-10)*

### **4.3 Support of weak learners**

Formative assessment helps reducing the gap between the weak learners and better performing students. Such results are noted whenever an identification of weak learners is followed by pedagog-

ical measures to support their learning. Teachers from our case study make deliberate efforts to bridge the gap by giving more attention to the work done by weak learners, partly to encourage them, partly also to make them realize that they need to put extra effort.

*When I give class work, I go around and I check childrens' books. I usually make a point of checking those particular students who are weak first. This is to reinforce them. I want them to think that sir is coming every time and checking my book. That'll make them put in more effort. ((102-65)*

The two teacher quotes below tell of specific formative assessment strategies teachers may aimed at giving differential support to weak learners.

*Very often in class there'll be some students who simply do not understand when teacher teaches. but when a friend teaches that same concept in some sort of simplified manner, they understand. (...) I actively encourage that. I always tell in the class that I know some of you may not then and there understand my way of explaining things, partly because I am the teacher. But don't let that stop you. You can always ask the person who has understood. I always encourage that. (214-373)*

*I generally do differentiated teaching in this manner. First I give some problem to everybody. Good students, say fast learners, they solve the problem faster. I then give a higher level, meaning a more difficult problem to them. While they work on that, I go to weaker section, the slow learners and give some hints, thereby helping their learning too. (106-50)*

In addition, almost all the case study schools have a practice of conducting remedial classes to cater to the needs of weak learners. According to a school administrator:

*We conduct remedial classes in the evening to re-teach the topics that students have not understood. (110-15)*

Such remedial classes are not confined to only the weak learners. All students can attend those classes. This may serve as a reminder that the assessment-based distinction between fast learners-slow learners is not teachers' only justification for practicing differential teaching. In the following quote a teacher describes his efforts to make the 'normal' classroom remedial for overcoming learning impediments due to students' introversion. This example also serves as a prelude to the social relations theme introduced in the next section.

*However much the teacher is friendly, some students are introvert and for them I see peer learning as a help. They will be able to talk with their friend and ask them for supplementary teaching. Usually I practice this in 9e where many are introverts. When I teach them and get vague answer, I tell them to form new sitting pairs composed of one fast extravert, one slow introvert, and I tell them to learn from each other. What one knows, the other may not know and vice versa. In this way, I also motivate them. Everybody has something to give. (102-47)*

## **5. Social relations and motivation are formative features of particular relevance to assessment**

The formative features of formative assessment are, of course, factors that actually promote the pertinent learning processes by providing better circumstances for the learning to take place. Certainly, these features must basically include social relations and motivation, which can be said to 'form an atmosphere' or 'strengthen the environment' of learning. The social relations that are important in terms of formative assessment and learning consist of peer relations amongst students and the teachers' respectful (or even friendly) relations with the students. Similarly, motivation stimulates learning, and the students' motivation increases when assessment becomes formative by relating clearly to the direction and importance of their learning. The

empirical points relating to these topics were found along four lines: Formative interaction, students' self-esteem, students' care-taking of the teaching-learning, and students' motivation for learning.

## **5.1 Formative interaction**

For teaching and learning to be effective, the teacher and the students must be able to communicate to each other. In most of the classroom observation, the level of communicative interaction between teacher and students is found to be good.

*The level of interaction between the teacher and the student was good during the class presentation... (201-23)*

Teachers encourage students to interact by involving them in discussion, asking questions, giving activities, or asking them to do class presentation. Such practices are noted in the classroom observations:

*Teacher involves the students in discussion. Teacher states sentences and ask students to complete them in the correct manner. Teacher also adds to answers provided by students. (105-12)*

*During the class presentation teacher would pick a student randomly to present his/her understanding of the concept, whereupon the teacher would supplement the student's input. (103-17)*

Student-centered teaching implies lots of interaction between teacher and students or amongst the students. The learning is enhanced through student participation. In the following quote, one teacher talks his own experiences with doing student-centered teaching, and compare them with his own schools days:

*What is your view on student centered learning?*

*I practice it and I find it very meaningful because as a school child I was exposed to teacher-centered teaching. Student centered learning is much more interactive and I feel certain that results are better. In student centered learning, when we distribute a task everybody is participating. Then learning takes place for everybody. (202-6)*

The following quote from a focus group gives a student perspective on a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning.

*How do your teachers create an environment in the classroom so that you feel like learning? Do your teachers create that environment?*

*Student 1: Yes sir. First they teach for a while, then they make a break, maybe saying some jokes to make us feel free. Then teaching starts again. That way we may keep our attention to the teaching.*

*Student 2: They share jokes like about Albert Einstein and other great persons. That way, we get knowledge as well as teaching, sir.*

*Student 3: They relate the teaching topic to realities of our life. For example, in English, if it is a ballad or a short story, the things that are happening in the book they relate to our own lives. Do such things happen there, how do they happen. Creating links between books and reality, that helps us. (307-137)*

## **5.2 Students' self-esteem**

Self-esteem is based on our personal assessment abilities and shortcomings. High self-esteem may make a student more daring in class. Teachers have a profound influence on the way students assess themselves in class. Most of our classroom observations showed students to be not-very-daring in posing self-initiated questions to teachers:

*However, the students did not voluntarily ask the teacher questions concerning the problems worked at. (103-47)*

When this point was discussed during a students' interview, it was explained that their apparent hesitancy to initiate question and answer dialogues was due to a fear that the teacher would criticize them.

*If the students make mistakes, perhaps foolish mistakes, then the teacher will point it out, and in a criticizing manner. I think that's one important reason keeping us silent. (507-49)*

*When we get bad comments, we feel for example if he is my friend no, when we got bad comments we feel shy. (217-134)*

Yet, students' views on this issue were not unanimous. The following quote tells the story of one student who – in contrast with some of his class-mates – feels teacher's critical remarks as a boost to his motivation.

*Some students think that when teacher give feedback or assessment then they think that they are torturing the students and that teacher is demotivating them. Instead I say that teachers are trying to motivate us and inspire us to learn more. (607-122)*

In the two following quotes teachers explains how they make an effort to avoid criticism and instead give his dialogue with students a positive twist.

*One important factor for enhancing learning is your image in students' eyes. A teacher should be respect by student but not feared. From the moment you enter the class, students should see you as approachable. The way we address the students and the words we use are really important. Sometimes we may feel inclined to criticize them. We must find other ways, and if we succeed I believe their learning will improve. (308-49)*

*My solution is to find ways of accepting their views. They provide some views of their own. Instead of rejecting them flat away, I take in their views, even if they may be wrong. I try to rephrase one idea. Rather than saying “no wrong”, I try to make connections between the learning goals and what they are actually giving. Criticism disheartens them and they feel shy and then they don’t feel like participating afterwards. Instead, even if their answers are wrong, one should accept them and try to relate them to the lesson contents. (404-61)*

Fear of being personally criticized by teacher represents, however, only one aspect of the more general comments made by students, saying that strict and unfriendly teachers make them hesitant to pose unasked-for questions.

*I think teachers should not be that strict with students because when teachers are so strict and when they are strictly concerned about the students and their marks, students do not feel free to expose their doubts. Then that doubt remains with them and when exam comes they are still not able to solve the problem. (507-19)*

*When the teacher is not very strict then I feel little hesitation to go and ask questions. (407-56)*

As a supplement to the strictness theme – and in continuation of earlier discussions on ‘differential teaching’ – students may mention that some teachers ignore their pleas for clarification and instead pay more attention to better performing student – thereby impeding learning for weaker students.

*Certain teachers, when we say we don’t understand, they don’t explain once more (...) And further, many teachers are focusing only on those who are toppers in the class. They care much about them, and those who are not intelligent or something like that, they are left out. (111-16)*

*The teacher should be non-partial to all the students. If teacher focuses more on us who are good in studies, other students who the teacher doesn't like will not be interested in participating in the class. (207-29)*

In one school, there is a unique practice where a teacher puts all students who have passed in the midterm exam in one group and those who have failed in another group. In the second group students are named as Fail 1, Fail 2 etc. In the focus group interview, further elaboration on the impact of such practices on student's self-esteem is absent. However, this practice according to a student is carried out by the teacher to enhance learning by giving more attention to the weak students as is obvious from her comment.

*For example in our mid-term exam some of our friends have failed and teacher divided the failures and the pass students. Then he gave the failures numbers like fail number 1 and fail number 2. It is easy to see he always gives more attention to failures. (307-49)*

The following quote describes another strategy, used by one teacher, to support weak learners

*Actually, we expect that everybody should learn, but due to their multiple abilities, some learn at once, others need more time. So usually, after every lesson, I used to recall and then ask questions and sometimes, if somebody is unable to recapitulate particular learning contents, then I may ask a student who knows to, then and there, help their friend, teach their friend. Everything we teach can never be equally understood by everybody. By asking friends to help each other I try to fulfill the objectives. (212-39)*

### **5.3 Students' care-taking of the teaching-learning**

As has been illustrated earlier Bhutanese students are indeed capable of taking over the organization of the teaching-learning process when they encounter obstacles that might hamper their learning. These obstacles can be associated with limitations on the side of the teacher, such as time constraint, unavailability of the teacher, or the teacher seems unapproachable in terms of being strict. In such cases there exist practices of getting help from the ones who have understood the concept being taught – and over time learning effects become mutual. The following student quotes are illustrations.

*If it is a very strict teacher, he may make us scared. So, we ask our bench mate and seat partners after the lesson whether they got it or not, and we try to get clarification from them. But if it is a teacher who is friendly and all, then we personally go to him and then tells him of our doubt. (507-119)*

*I prefer to go to friends as compared to teachers because, most importantly, we can talk with our friends freely (407-59)*

*What we don't know, the others may know and what they don't know, we may be knowing. So we can feel free to ask them and tell them what we don't grasp. (407-60)*

### **5.4 Students' motivation for learning**

As earlier hinted at, students' motivation or engagement in learning increases when students can relate to the examples used by teachers in their lessons. The quote below is from a class observation. Many more examples are found in part III.

*The teacher supported content learning, e.g. "Public corporation", by citing relevant examples from the Bhutanese context. "Public corporation" became "Bank of Bhutan", "Royal Insurance Corporation of Bhutan" etc. Students seemed to take*

*extra interest in these examples and the whole class was attentively listening to the teacher. (103-29)*

Using positive responses as a boost to students' motivation has also been extensively exemplified above. The first quote below is from a teacher, the second from a class observation.

*I don't beat them or scold them but I use all these reinforcement ideas. (...) When they give good answer, I reinforce them by letting others applause, and also use different reinforcement such as good, perfect, well done. (102-21)*

*The teacher listened to the ideas presented by the students carefully, and then the comments were made in a positive tone. (103-32)*

A mathematics teacher refers to giving class presentation as yet another method to encourage learning.

*Mathematics is a lot about problem solving, getting it right. Do you use other approaches to engage your students? Sometime I use presentations. I give them a task, ask them to prepare overnight and then to present their solution in the next class. That may motivate them to engage deeper in the work. (106-14)*

One special motivational theme concerns the way students' social problems related, e.g., to family background may hamper their learning. Two teacher quotes may serve as illustrations.

*What do you think some of the reasons are for students not being motivated to learn in the class? One type of problem pertinent to our school is that many students come from faraway places. They are totally tired after having maybe walked for one and a half hours or even more. They wake up early and come here. Sometimes they haven't*

*even had breakfast. They remain tired. It also happens that students come to me for personal advice. I am not good at giving counseling, but I may have been their class teacher. I give them suggestions. It may be family problems, problems related to poverty or even to lack of parents. (...) After school hours, when they get back they are again asked to do works like fetching water, firewood, taking care of cattle. They share these things with us. We have to understand them. We should not neglect them. (202-38)*

*Sometimes I approach a student myself and ask whether he/she is sick or whether he/she had breakfast/lunch or any personal problem he/she has. (102-17)*

Students' well-being aside, teachers may point to their own well-being or general approach to teaching as a factor potentially influencing students' motivation to learn. A teacher gives an example on how a teacher's approach may lead to students losing interest in learning:

*It is basically about us. For example, if we happen to go to class in an off-day mood, then students become demotivated. If you enter the class healthy, happy and energetic, you yourself motivated to teach them, then students appear motivated. (...) Also, if we do not correct their books or their work then they are not motivated. (102-27)*

In addition, lack of teaching and learning resources and classroom setup are cited as other factors that hamper learning.

*Teacher 2: The classroom situation itself is one important factor. The classroom size, infrastructure available in the class, teaching-learning materials, etc. Inadequate classroom facilities are one major factor influencing motivation and learning. However hard teacher tries, learning gets hampered if, e.g., the classroom is too packed, congested and the teacher can't move and can't move groups around properly.*

*Teacher 3: Lack of books and IT-resources is one other problem. In geography teacher I must do a lot of research because textbook material is inadequate both for teachers and students. We go to the library, in the library they don't have the books, so we have to access internet, but don't have the proper facilities. On those account we waste a lot of time. With limited resources we try our best and then ask the students to do the rest. Lack of resources is one factor that dominates students' lives. (404-60)*

Classroom observations made it is clear that the classrooms in many cases, and especially in rural schools, are compact, dimly lit and in some cases teacher's movement is restricted. The students sitting utensils, i.e. desks and benches are arranged in long rows with almost no space between rows. In some classes, students had tables and chairs instead of desk and benches. Still, however, the tables are arranged in long rows to accommodate more students. This kind of a sitting arrangement hampers student movement. A student sitting in the center or close the class wall will have to disturb all the students sitting in the row behind as well as the row in which he is sitting if he has to move from his place. Besides, in some classes most tube lights and fans are not working. An example of these classrooms' setup is found in one of the classroom observations, which is similar to observations made in other case study schools:

*Classroom looked very congested with 40 students. There was no enough space to move around for the group activity. Only three ceiling fans were available, out of which one was not working. (301-9)*

## **6. The topic of 'the formative' is associated with the modern system of education**

For effective learning to take place, a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning is a must and constructive learning gets jeopardized when fear is instilled in students. "Learning-conducive classroom"

here refers to an open and friendly relation between teachers and students. Such an approach to learning is associated with the modern system of education and our data shows (as was also more briefly reported in part III) that most parents regard it as a cultural threat. Evidence of this is presented below through the following four sub-themes: Parents' reserved attitude, parents' educational background, students' attitude, and long term benefits of formative assessment.

### **6.1 Parents' reserved attitude towards formative assessment**

For formative assessment to effectively take place the teacher and the students should interact and for that the teacher has to be open, approachable and friendly. However, some parents feel that when the teacher is friendly to students, students are not scared of the teacher and then, according to their perspective, learning does not take place. They would want the teachers to be strict and instill some kind of a fear in students as a means for promoting learning. The following three parent quotes serve as illustrations.

*I think we need teachers to remain as teacher and not as a friend with students. We must know a teacher is a teacher and student is a student, but when students need it we should be helpful to them. (...) I think teachers should be approachable and know how to listen to students' problems but they must also be strict. (515-105)*

*Comparing to my own school days as far as quality is concerned, in those days strictness was there. Maybe due to fear, maybe due to something else, we did study hard. When I compare my school's class seven/eight writing and today's class ten/twelve writing, I would say our learning was better. But there are improvement in other things like they are far spoken, children possess forwardness, they do not fear anyone. (405-84)*

*I am not sure whether it is getting hampered or not but finally it will hamper the quality of education because we should not give so much of freedom to the children. May be it may not be education fault but parents fault. But children should not be given so much of freedom. (405-80)*

As was also discussed in earlier book parts, parents feel the initiation by the government to remove corporal punishment completely in the Bhutanese schools is too early:

*Parent 2: I would like to talk on driglam namza (etiquette). We often hear in BBS that teacher never put hand on students; they cannot give any corporal punishment to the students. They say the student should realize their mistakes themselves and get corrected. But deep inside I feel we should not compare our country with those developed and civilized countries and use their ideas in our system. I feel there is mismatch in the system. I don't want a complete return our time where teacher used to punch us. Neither should error correction be left exclusively to the child. But use some minor form of corporal punishment is needed.*

*Parent 1: I think of banning the corporal punishment like the development country is too early for the Bhutan. There should be some corporal punishment now. May be 30 to 40 years later banning of corporal punishment should be implemented but not now.*

*Parent 2: Today's youth do not fear any one. Children hear BBS at home and they know the rules so if teachers tries to use corporal punishment, they go against the teachers. In our time we really fear our teacher, we never looked at their face directly. But these days we observed, many children do not even stand when a teacher passes by. Why? Because they do not fear the teachers. I feel a little fear helps us to be mindful of what we are doing. Our country have not reached that standard like the developed country so they should be some strict rules in*

*the school, may be 40 years later afford to we can afford such rules. (305-157)*

We present the following quote from one school principal as a reminder that that the cited parents' attitudes is not in line with national educational policy

*Being strict and using punishment is something I am really against. I also ask our teachers never to use corporal punishment. It instills fear in students and when fear is there I don't think students will do well in the classroom. They might bunk also, or refrain from attending classes. If fear is what makes them attend class, I do believe they will end up as losers. (216-240)*

Our empirical material makes it evident that parents, generally speaking, take a keen interest in their children's school life. Yet, very often their main concern is with the marks scored, i.e. the summative assessments obtained by their children. First a student quote, then a parent quote illustrate this.

*My parents always ask my mark. Whenever I have done class test, I have to daily inform my parents, especially my father he check my mark. (217-210)*

*My daughter generally gets good grades in humanities but gets lesser grades in subjects like science/maths. I do scold her for getting lesser grades especially in science/maths and tell her to study more of these subjects. (109-46)*

## **6.2 Parent's educational background**

The amount of learning support one can render to one's children is dependent on one's own education background. Absence of formal education was a shared characteristic among most parents from our sample.

*Coming from an economically poor background, I have not had any formal education. (205-11)*

*Because we the parents are illiterate (405-5)*

*We don't see their notes since we don't ourselves understand what they're writing. (405-37)*

When uneducated, parents are unable to extend substantial help to their children as school-goers. Their support becomes limited to posing general questions and urging their children to study hard. The following quote is typical.

*We ask them how they are doing in class. And advise them to study well, otherwise they'll get into trouble later. (405-38)*

Students also express lack of help from their parents in their learning due to their parents' educational background:

*As for me, my parents are all farmers. (207-135)*

*As my parents are uneducated and I don't share anything with them. About school affairs they know nothing. (217-208)*

Even when it comes to educated parents from our sample, some students mention that they are unable support their learning due to changes in curriculum compared to the one their parents studied:

*At young ages our parents used to help. Not like that anymore. Main reasons is curriculum has totally changed. They ask us to try ourselves. (407-66)*

*Sometimes, in the lower classes, they could help. Now I am in class XI and the stream (subject) they took is not same as mine. But they help in some subjects like English and Dzongkha. My father is actually a Dzongkha teacher. (507-135)*

Level of educational background will also, and understandably so, influence parents' readiness to approach teachers, e.g. to express dissatisfaction with the marks obtained. The following interview exchange is with an uneducated parent:

*Is the poor performance due to your children's own inability to perform well?*

*My children say that teacher teaches them well but they themselves are not able to perform well. Therefore the grades are not up to their expectation.*

*When your children tell you that the grades are not up to their expectation, do you go to the teacher and consult what could have been the reason?*

*No, I am sometimes shy and other times scared. (205-35)*

Conversely, the following quote describes an educated parent for whom it was very natural to put technical questions to teachers about the way class tests were constructed.

*Indeed I put questions to teachers. Today I actually asked the mathematics teacher how he makes the question pattern for the class trail paper. He responded by telling me that he follows BBE pattern and the past question papers. (305-110)*

One educated parent, who happened to be a teacher in the case school, shared with us his rather special reasons for not approaching his colleagues about marks obtained by his daughter. The said reasons had nothing to do with his being scared or shy. Rather he felt that, due to his position in the school, he might be seen as taking extra, and somehow improper care of his daughter's fortune. Instead he tries to make his daughter accept that, e.g., teacher's heavy workload may lie behind possible mistake.

She may for instance show me a paper related to assessment, and maybe a teacher has overlooked something, and she tells me her paper is supposed to be correct, but somehow the teacher has not given the expected mark. (...) "I got one only and I am supposed to

get at least one and half, maybe two, and I deserve that!" – is what she says. She is not happy.

What do you do then? As a parent do you go to the teacher and say what could have gone wrong?

As of now I have not done that. Actually I tell her the teacher might have overlooked this because of the heavy workload. No system is error-proof. I do tell her that you are supposed to get what you have expected but here something seems to have been overlooked. "Never mind" – I tell her. "The answers are correct, that's what matters."

### **6.3 Student' attitude towards formative assessment**

One large group of students would clearly like to have teachers who are open and friendly and with whom they can discuss their doubts as mentioned in section 5.1. But there is also a student group who, in line with the majority of our sample's parents, feel that effective learning depends upon teacher's strictness. For them, learning takes place when some degree of fear is instilled in them. Partly, their attitude relates to the idea that students take undue advantage of teachers who are not strict.

*I actually want teacher to be little strict. If not strict I saw many students taking advantage of them. I would like to stop it, but in class I cannot raise my voice and say that or she is doing this or that. (111-9)*

The following quotes belonging to students from the same focus group interview, teacher's strictness gets associated with fear of exams as motivating factors.

*Student 1: Sir, first of all, teacher should be strict, if teacher is strict we remain alert in class.*

*Student 4: Sir, teachers may also remind us about our examinations, that also motivates us.*

*Student 5: To me fear is motivating. If teacher makes us fearful about exams and test, then we tend to engage more heavily in our academic studies. (407-22)*

## **6.4 Long term benefits of formative assessment**

Students in one case study school are found to appreciate when teachers assign classwork, homework and other tasks where formative assessment is embedded. However, their expressed appreciation is not directly concerned with the scholastic learning as such, but rather with possible long term benefits related to a professional career after school.

*Do you like these assessment practices? So many exams, test, homework etc., do you like it? Your personal view.*

*Student 1: As a person, I may not like it. But I do think it benefits us. When we do more assignments, more project work, we also learn more. In order to have a brighter future, more assignments, project work and related activities must be done.*

*Student 2: I share my friend's opinion. Personally I also dislike many of the things we have to go through. Some students may have stage fright, they cannot speak in front of a crowd. But like my friend said it, if we look at it positively, some benefits will follow. In the longer run, when, e.g., we go to a university stage fright will be gone because we have already faced it during high school.*

## **7. Formative assessment requires time and resources that often seem to be unavailable**

Our interview data points at a large number of factors acting as barriers against the practical implementation of formative assessment: Teachers' workload together with the lack of time and resources. A rigid and vast syllabus to be covered within stipulated time and lots of reporting requirements put down by schools and administrators.

The professional support to help teachers integrate assessment practices within their teaching is almost negligent. All such constraints tend to make the teaching and learning process teacher-centered. Formative assessment may even be perceived by teachers as procedures that actually take time away from their teaching. This overall challenge is documented as being related to the following problematic topics: teachers' workload, administrative support, syllabus/curriculum, distraction.

### **7.1 Teachers' workload**

Though formative assessment is associated with bringing improvement in students' learning, its practice in the teaching and learning process is most of the time (according to, first, one principal, then one teacher quoted below) being compromised due to heavy teaching workload.

*For me the main problem related to assessment is that most of our teachers have to comply with so many instructions concerning lesson planning originating the ministry of education. Given that their teaching portfolio involves them in teaching three, four subjects in a day, it's my definite impression that their capacity to carry out continuous assessment as required is being compromised. (506-56)*

*I have 25 periods in a week (one period is 50 minutes) and I hardly get one or two periods free in a day. That also I have to do planning lesson for next day. (212-379)*

A teaching period in Bhutanese schools is the face to face contact a teacher has with the students. It doesn't include the time spent by teachers on lesson planning or correcting students' work. In addition to heavy workload, teachers mention time constraint due to a large number of students in the class as a hindrance for them to practice formative assessment. This leads to a tendency to assess quantity of

work rather than quality as is highlighted by the following teachers' quotes:

***How many students do you have?***

*I am teaching class VI and X. In class X we have around 70+ and in class VI we have 70.*

***So are you able to manage the homework correction, test correction?***

*No madam but I am trying my best. Maybe 50% or 60% I am able to do but I think other I am not able to do because of time constraint. (510-310)*

*Time is very important. If we could have more time we could expand on issues related to teaching topics and clarify questions of concern to every individual in the class. What in end becomes our main concern is simply complete the syllabus. (518-34)*

*As a result of heavy workload, the feedback I give to students gets limited to "work not complete" or "You have done this well". Even so, providing feedback becomes quite a challenge as a consumer of time. (104-29)*

Parents also comment on teachers' heavy workload resulting in poor assessment procedures.

*Frankly speaking , because of the large number of students a teacher has to assess, quality assessment is suffering. We have classwork, homework and project work, yet sometimes I feel quality assessment of all these activities is lacking. (215-117)*

During action research interviews some teachers also mentioned various school activities that they are expected to organize, run or participate in as adding on to their workload:

*School has become the target of all sorts of policy decision, the hot-bed on everyone's agenda. Then we have regional tourna-*

*ment, intra tournament and community education classes. The day before yesterday there was mental health program. Before that there was rabies workshop. Such a lot of activities, and they do tire us out. When I myself was in class 9, our teacher used to enjoy life, after teaching hours he had his freedom. They could relax and had no special obligations after teaching was done. Nowadays, we are pulled in all directions; we are also pulled into the kitchen. (112-160)*

One curriculum officer shares this perception of teachers as being overburdened with extracurricular activities:

*The workload does make it difficult for teacher to cope with the changes. We shouldn't blame the teachers, it is the system. Continually we pour so many things into the system. Today one school must deal with the GNH program, tomorrow they have youth program and so on. Soon there will be election clubs, then we have legal issues , UNESCO clubs and so many. All these activities are mandatory, coming from the top down, teachers have no choice but to participate. (...) If these pressures could be minimized, things would turn out better. So, that is one of the tumbling block we are up against. (802-396)*

## **7.2 Administrative support**

Teaching and learning processes are affected by the conditions of support offered by the school administrators in terms of managing the teachers' workload, time, resources, and professional development. According to information provided by interviewed teachers, the administrator cannot be counted upon to support their formative assessment activities.

*You have said time constraint gives you problems, in such cases do you get any kind of help from administration?  
No, so far not. From administration side I no help is coming.  
(510-288)*

In cases where support from administration is mentioned it is most often shaped as managerial control checking whether teachers fulfill their obligations in areas like lesson planning and maintaining record of the various recurrent assessments. One principal describes the managerial monitoring system used in his school as follows.

*We have already instituted School Level Monitoring and Support Service. The system implies a division of our teachers into different subject-specific groups. Then we have monitors who are named subject heads. The monitors in turn are supervised or monitored by the principal. (...) Monitors' duty is to observe their colleagues in class and give relevant feedback. Further, as part of their checking all this, they ensure that teachers' lesson planning is in line with the standard lesson format developed by the school. Whether or not this is the case: are all important lesson planning components in place? – is controlled by the monitors. Basically this is what we do in terms of monitoring and quality control as regards academic work. (206-6)*

Similar practices are reported in other case study schools. Teachers on their side express that matters like rigid timetables for assigning work, not receiving the assigned work for timely correction, and almost no support from administration are factors that affect the teaching and learning process:

*Class timetable is always fixed from above, homework timetable is fixed. We cannot get notebooks anytime we like. In our subject maths, we have been fighting for this right because there is no period where we don't give homework. There are ten to twelve questions in a notebook and we are asked to give only three questions in a day. So what about the rest? (214-351)*

One teacher mentions that lack of professional support concerning assessment practices obliges him to rely on accidental help from colleagues who have attended professional development courses:

*Nobody has given me information on these professional development issues. All my knowledge in the area I got in my previous school from one peer friend, who had attended a workshop on assessment. (514-221)*

Education officials agree that they are not able to provide every teacher with the professional support needed. Their stated aim is to at least train some selected teachers who shall then, in turn, train the school's remaining teachers. But due to various reasons these aims may not be fulfilled as planned.

*Remember, some of the schools have just one or two teachers. One teacher may fall sick, one may be on maternity leave. That leaves at best one teacher to attend one, two or three workshops. If their absences coincide no one attends the workshops. In the latter case, they have to teach the new curriculum without any training. They try their best, but for lack of training it may be a lost case. So they end up teaching the old curriculum. (801-274)*

The education official just quoted raises other critical issues which, most importantly, affect Bhutanese schools placed in remote areas.

*These issues are touchy ones, but I do feel that the competence level of some teachers is not quite up to standard. They may, for instance, complain that the language used in the new curricula is difficult to understand. Now, when they themselves experience problems of understanding, can they be expected to deliver properly? I believe this somehow has affected learning processes in the classroom. The problem, of course, is especially acute for teachers in remote schools. Due to teacher shortage, some teachers are more or less permanently placed in remote schools. (...) Since in these schools and environments they cannot have much guidance and support from others, they may end up speaking a fairly broken English. (801-279)*

*Teacher shortage is the normal state of affairs in the remote schools. To fill up the gap we appoint community based teachers who are just class 12 graduates. They get no more than one or two weeks training. After that they start teaching. Of course they try to get assistance from the senior teachers but senior teachers themselves are bogged down with so many teaching loads. So they are not able to provide education support. This situation also impacts students' learning negatively. (801-293)*

Teacher shortage is also mentioned by one administrator as one reason why he is not able to offer much help to teachers in terms of reducing their workload.

*We would definitely like to reduce the work load of appointed monitors, because, apart from their teaching load, they also have their monitoring responsibilities. But we cannot do it because of the general shortage of teachers. (206-26)*

### **7.3 Syllabus/curriculum**

In most case study schools, emphasis on covering the syllabus on time is frequently mentioned. In the classroom observation, teachers are often found rushing through the lesson to cover the planned contents on time.

*During the whole process, only one kind of teaching was observed. All interaction taking place between the teacher and students was also narrowed down to one kind, i.e. teacher talking to whole class and whole class responding to teacher. Teacher seemed to be in a hurry to finish the class and was most of the time facing the board, writing and explaining. He hardly looked at the students. (213-43)*

The two teacher quotes deals with the same issue as seen from a teacher's perspective.

*We need to cover the syllabus on time because that actually matters a lot. We are always concerned about covering a particular topic or chapter during a given time period. (518-40)*

*Syllabus is a big hindrance. We are always short of time. With the present syllabus we are always behind in mathematics. It is very, very difficult. We have so many 101 questions and if you try to solve all the problems, you will never finish on time. (112-67)*

According to teachers, the vast syllabus combined with a limited timeframe leads them to give less priority to formative assessment practices.

*Time pressure makes me give mostly oral feedback here and now. More extensive written feedback is out of the question. I have to think of covering the syllabus in time. (208-27)*

*In a week I get only three periods for that class and if I use one, e.g., for self-assessment, that would leave me with only two periods and two periods are not enough. So, time constraint makes me reduce self-assessment in class. (212-359)*

One special syllabus-related problem is exposed by one teacher, namely a big jump in the syllabus from class X to class XI. Such a jump activates children's need for learning support, e.g. in the form of formative assessment.

*If you compare the class 10 syllabus with the class 11 syllabus, there is a big difference. Very vast difference is there. Such a big jump in content aspects, combined with syllabus vastness, is difficult for children to handle. (112-88)*

Education officials talk about fixed curriculum and obligatory syllabus coverage as a 'check and balance tool' (terms used by them)

making it possible, for themselves and for the Ministry, to see that things are happening as mandated in schools.

*Syllabus coverage is like a type of check and balance tool for us as well as for the Ministry. If syllabus coverage is not checked then some schools may not do as required. (802-189)*

Below three statements are presented from interviewed district education officers. All statements are based on the awareness that mandatory coverage of a vast poses problems for schools. On that backdrop implications for students' learning as ways of handling the challenges are discussed.

*Talking about formative assessment, we know that is supposed to help, not only teacher but definitely also students to assess the latter's learning thereby motivating them to learn further. But then when we in our roles as administrators or monitors visit the schools our main attention is directed at checking whether the syllabus is covered according to plan. So our visits primarily deal with administrative matters rather than with the actual learning the students are hopefully obtaining. (801-35)*

*During the monitoring visits I also see how students are performing. I try to look at their midterm progress report. One kind of support that we do try to provide in this area deals with schools' way of analyzing these reports. Like in the past most schools say that if they have 100% pass, then their performance is very good or excellent. But I go behind these figures and question their analysis. Because even if you have 100% pass, student's individual marks may all be 40s and 50s which is very poor. (...) So we try to advise schools not just to look at the pass percentage rather we also have look holistically. So this is our advice and the ministry stands behind that format. By trying to disseminate that information to schools I believe we*

*have also helped the schools to get a more realistic of where there stand as far as student learning is concerned. (801-122)*

*Whenever we as division members go and visit schools we always get this feedback concerning vast syllabus. So, we actually sat with the curriculum department and I actually do think, some of the syllabuses are now in the process of being revised. Yet I also feel that as teacher or tutors we must show patience. (...) I know saying that is easier than actually doing it in the classroom. Simply reducing the syllabus based on a conviction that it keeps us from doing formative assessment is not a good solution. The best thing is maybe trying to experiment with doing formative assessment, not on a large scale, but as and when you feel it is needed. You need not do it all the time. Doing it all the time would make it a burden for the teachers. Teachers should use it when they see the learners they know need their help. If based on need as well as the situation, it should be carried out. (803-231)*

## **7.4 Distraction**

Often in our interviews, formative assessment is not spoken of as something that helps the process of learning. Instead it is viewed as a required additional work which has to be fitted into teaching and learning process. It is looked upon as distracting teacher's teaching, an extra consumer of valuable time. In the quote below a teacher's resistance to formative assessment is linked to the idea that homework assignments lead to students copying from each other:

***What kind of Formative Assessment do you do in connection to Class work, homework or project work?***

*Normally I don't provide homework at all, because home work to me is simply a waste of time. Children go home and some get to work, others don't. But most often, after coming back to school, they will get hold of their friends' notebooks for copying purposes, that's a common sight in the schools. That's why , I*

*normally place assignments at the end of the unit, and I basically prefer to do the testing, not in the classroom but outside where we can separate the children, have some distance between them. With homework assignments, they just tend to copy whatever their friends have done. (404-89)*

The school administrator quoted below concurs that, even though guidelines for assessment practices are provided and monitoring is done, some teachers still think that such practices are just taking time away from their teaching.

*The monitoring of formative assessment is not adequate. Actually each Head of the department is supposed to monitor, but in practice it is not adequate. One reason why formative assessment is not happening the way it should happen is resistance from certain teachers. They find it distracts them from their teaching. (406-27)*

The education official quoted below expresses experience-based hopes that professional development workshops may help teachers gain a more constructive understanding of the importance of formative assessment.

*Regarding this formative assessment, I do think the GNH workshops have helped giving teachers ideas about how to conduct and how to record or formative assessment. During workshops, I have found that teachers initially do find formative assessment it difficult to handle, just as is indicated in your study. It requires extra time, it adds to their workload. Yet, during the course of our workshops, and by presenting formative assessment as syllabus driven, teacher centered educational tools, it is my impression we manage more or less to convince them that it is part and parcel of the teaching skills and strategies. Giving it enough time, I think formative assessment is very important to ensure quality education. (803-28)*

Yet another teacher points at vast syllabus and time pressure as forces making them do summative assessment in the name of formative assessment:

*I would like to know your overall view on this formative assessment?*

*First thing, to be honest not all people do it as they are supposed to. That to me is the great failure of formative assessment. When it finally comes to practice teachers do summative evaluation only. This may not apply to everybody but it happens to many of us. Because where is the time to track off every little detail of every child. If for example I teach 10 sections each one covering 40 students try and count the number of students on whom I have to collect formative assessment. So that becomes a problem and most teachers simply do their assessments at the end. (308-122)*

## **8. Theoretical discussion**

The features of formative assessment of most importance for learning in the context of Bhutanese secondary schools are found to be the following:

- A student-centered framework for the practices of formative assessment
- Peer assessment as an integrated element of peer learning
- Feedback practices of a genuinely formative kind
- Extensive usage of dialogue with questioning

Formative assessment practices in Bhutanese secondary schools exist with lots of misconceptions and needs a revamp. The introduction of continuous assessment to curb the school dropout rate and grade repetition thereby reducing the wastage of government budget has led to an actual emphasis on summative assessment. This in turn has led to formative assessment practice taking a back seat. In con-

sequence, the question arises of in how far learning has really taken place due to assessment practices.

For formative assessment to be efficient, students have to take an active part in their own learning i.e., the learning has to be student-centered. But the currently dominating teaching-learning approach in Bhutanese secondary schools only allows for student participation in activities that are highly teacher directed. Clearly, the respect bestowed to teachers in the classroom encourages students to be passive learners. Something similar is the case in many other Asian countries<sup>19</sup>.

The conceptual misunderstanding of formative assessment as identical to continuous assessment, the underdeveloped practice of peer and self- assessment and the limited attention paid to the feedback process have prevented any full fledged practice of formative assessment that could radically improve the students' learning. The problem is further aggravated by the teachers' poor working conditions, students' economically disadvantaged family background and minimal professional support for teachers.

As it was pointed out in the introduction to this part of the book, practices of formative assessment are not adopted quickly and without any problem, but require a process of training and adaptation. Undoubtedly, there is also a question about the maturity of the students at play<sup>20</sup>. In addition, it should be considered how culture influences the conditions for formative assessment in the schools. Studies show that cultural settings have a noticeable significance on how formative assessment is implemented (Chen et al . 2014; Raveaud 2004).

Besides all the problems outlined, the research findings indicate the potential for a formative assessment practice. Almost all the students who participated in the case study indicated their desire to be more actively involved in the learning processes. The students were found to read and use the feedback from the teachers to improve their learning, though it was often generic in nature. Teachers on

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19 Cf. Pham 2012; Pham & Renshaw 2013; Roder 2012; Zohrabi, Torabi & Baybourdiani 2012.

20 Peer assessment, in particular, is mostly studied (and probably also applied) at university level, and might perhaps be scaring to students at primary school level (Hargreaves 2015).

their part expressed their genuine interest to undertake formative assessment practices like peer and self-assessment. They communicated that the assessment they are practicing as of now is hardly sufficient to bring about learning in students. Some of the school administrators also expressed their interest to learn more about formative assessment practices so that they would be able to assist their teachers and students in that regard.

## PART V: A GOVERNMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

The three interviewed officials represent different levels of the administration and governance of education in Bhutan. The EMO is a representative of the Ministry of Education, the Curriculum Officer is a representative of the Department of Curriculum Research and Development which is part of the ministry and the CDEO is the local officer in the district working to implement the guidelines and instructions of the ministry, monitoring the quality of education at the schools of the district and providing support to develop the quality if necessary.

Before the interviews the official were introduced to preliminary findings in the research project concerning assessment, quality of education and GNH and the interview concentrates on these issues and on the interviewees' respond to the preliminary findings and their elaborations on the issues from their point of view.

The first issue is assessment and the preliminary finding is, that the teachers have difficulties distinguishing between continuous assessment (both continuous formative assessment, continuous summative assessment) and formative assessment. The teachers interpret the formative assessment as the formalized continuous formative assessment that is actually carried out as term test twice a year with marks, which is actually continuous summative assessment. The officials can recognize this confusion and the EMO has observed that the teachers confuse continuous assessment with formative assessment.

*The Curriculum Officer has detailed knowledge on the different forms of assessment the teachers are supposed to carry out and the problems with doing it. The Curriculum Officer point out that there is three forms of assessment:*

*Continuous assessment (CA) is broken to continuous formative assessment (CFA) and continuous summative assessment [CSA] and the third one is summative assessment [SA]... In the CFA, it is purely just for feedback and no marking and as per my*

*understanding if we are to grade or record or mark the students' performance, then ... it becomes summative and therefore we have categorized CA to another category, CSA, where actually ongoing marks are given. ... But actually teachers are doing the recording of students [and] that is ongoing assessment. ... So, what they record is actually CSA. The informal type of assessment that goes on in class room, where the teachers go around while students are given some work, give the support, try to find out how the students are doing and then if the students are making mistakes, on the spot they try to help, that is actually the CFA. And CFA is actually happening because they do that informally. Maybe teachers are not aware of that, but actually they are doing that.*

In addition the Curriculum Officer point out that the teachers probably doesn't know that the informal assessment they are performing in the classroom can be termed formative assessment, and that that is why they don't think, they are performing formative assessment. The Curriculum Officer explains:

*They are doing the things, but they are not able to give a term to what they are exactly doing and this is very common in Bhutan. It happens all the time.*

The Curriculum Officer points to a very interesting discussion about the purpose of assessment. Is the assessment only of the learning or is it primarily *for* the learning? The Curriculum Officer thinks that the whole purpose with assessment is for the learning, but in reality, because of little time and many students, assessment becomes assessment of the learning.

It is recognized by all officials, that it is difficult for the teachers to find time to give feedback on the student's homework, and especially it is difficult for the teacher to follow up on the feedback given to the student.

The Curriculum Officer is very engaged in developing curriculum, tools and textbooks to facilitate the development of competences the

student can transfer from the educational setting to real life. Educational activities like scrapbooks and more project work can help develop this kind of competencies:

*Making students to realize their feelings make them to reflect on what they have done, on what they have observed and then to write down, has huge impact on child's development. So that is why we have scrapbook and also through project work we hope that our students should be prepared for world of works. In the real situation, we are confounded with so many problems, life related problems and if they have the ability to carry out research through project work, in the future they will be well equipped with ability to solve the life related problems.*

The Curriculum Officer points to a challenge about changing the curriculum and the teaching to make it more competence based, but also to a necessary change of mindset, so that the students become more reflective, analytical and critical.

Another problem concerning the quality of teaching is the teachers' challenge of having the time to carry out formative assessment:

*Because of the time, I think, we are more geared with, as it is being said, syllabus driven, teacher centered. That is because of the time.'(EMO)*

The teachers experience a dilemma because if they focus on student centered learning processes, they are not in a position to cover the syllabus. So in higher grades the teaching consists of lecture and giving notes (CDEO). In general the teachers are seen as overburdened with too many responsibilities and the result is that the teachers have difficulties to cope with all the changes.

A challenge, detected by the CDEO, is teacher shortage in the remote schools. This problem is solved with filling up with community based teachers who are just class 12 graduates with one or two weeks of training. But they are not competent enough. They don't understand properly and therefore they can't deliver properly. As a

result, the students don't pick it up properly either. Especially English language is a problem, as the CDEO explains:

*We can see that there is lot of students, when we ask question to students, they are not able to express properly in English especially. Whenever you ask question they will try to answer uttering words and not in sentence.*

Another challenge which the preliminary findings point to, is the challenges with infusing GNH across all subjects. This is also a recognizable problem. The officials agree to the teachers view that it is possible to infuse GNH in the lower classes, but difficult in the higher classes and it is easier to infuse GNH in subjects like Dzongkha (the national language) and English and more difficult to infuse GNH in science and math. It is the impression that there are variations between the schools as to how much they have worked with GNH.

So if there have to be more infusion of GNH in the subjects it might be a question of putting more effort into working with the integration of GNH into the subjects. The teachers of science think that GNH is value based and science is technical and that the two things are difficult to bring together. From the Curriculum Officer's point of view this is a problem, because GNH can only be learned through practice and the integration into different subjects provides the practice, so if GNH is not integrated, it is not taught.

The Curriculum Officer has an interesting reflection on the significance of the culture of the school and the possibility of GNH. The problem is that there is much fear and insecurity in the institutions: "teachers are afraid of principals and principals are afraid of DEOs and that is the irony". So promoting GNH could implicate to develop the culture of the institutions and create more positive and empathic culture in the school.

## PART VI: THE METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT



Hermeneutic phenomenology is used as the general methodology of our research project. In a few keywords, the methodology can be outlined as follows:

**Main components of the overall (conceptual as well as empirical) research process:**

- description (observation, registration and abstraction/reduction)
- interpretation ('construction' of the research perspective): contextual understanding, including pre-understanding
- critique ('deconstruction' of well-known conceptual framework, for reinterpretation of its problematic aspects)

### **Theoretical references:**

Ricoeur (1991) on three levels of knowledge (attained e.g. through a process of analysis):

*Subjective understanding -> objective explanation -> research interpretation*

Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) on reflexive sociology, notably including: self-critical reflection of the researcher's participation (competent, but biased) in the process.

Inspiration for further specification of the research design and analyses: Blaikie 2010, Flick 2009, Kvale 1996.

### **Analysis as a third phase of the entire research process**

- design (focus on critique & interpretation)
- data collection (focus on description)
- analysis (description, interpretation, critique)
- writing

### **Procedures of our hermeneutic analysis**

Deductive component (from theoretical concepts and established perspectives to empirical observation): Top-down interpretation of how our research themes are transformed into the research design and guides for the empirical investigations.

Inductive component (from empirical data to conceptual and theoretical reflection): The bottom-up description employed in our empirical analysis: letting the empirical material 'speak for itself'; finding central issues through interesting cores of meaning by the way of condensation and labeling ("categorization").

Abductive reflection (to discover a coherence that unites the general and the special): As an analytical result, the coherence asserts a conceptual characteristic through the empirically observable. The aim is that the discovered coherence of the general and the special is of an exemplary kind. Abduction is going to take place in our conceptual analyses of the case studies, which follows after the present process of empirical analysis.

### **Solidity (scientific sustainability) of the results**

- Validity: Have we found realities of the investigated matters?
- Reliability: Is our research process transparent due to careful rendering of all steps and decisions? In principle, would others have found the same?
- Exemplarity: In a perspective of competent interpretation, are the results 'exemplary' in the sense of typical, interesting, relevant?

The three questions of solidity should be considered in relation to each singular result of the investigation.

## **1. Research design**

The variety of schools selected as cases for the investigation serves to gain a rich data material. Our inquiry is not a comparative investigation of the cases. The schools are dispersed geographically, including rural as well as urban areas. The level is middle secondary or higher secondary (grade 8-12). The subject taught is not a selective factor. These are the seven schools that constitute our cases:

- Samtse
- Yoeseltse
- Peljorling
- Phuntsholing
- Gedu
- Drujeygang
- Zhemgang

The empirical material to be collected in each case encompasses:

- a description of the school setting,
- document analysis,
- observation,
- semi-structured interviews, and
- action research.

The description of the school setting is not specified with a particular format, but intended to briefly indicate any contextual matter that might be of importance to teaching, learning or the school life in general. A guide with three main points was developed for the document analysis (see appendix 1): How are our research themes expressed or reformulated in literature relating to the school in question or to the school system more generally? What relevant kinds of written material are there to be found? Is there any written material to inform us as to the description of the school setting?

The method of semi-structured interviews was applied with a set of different respondents:

- Teachers individually (or in a group)
- Pupils in a group
- Parents individually (or in a group)
- Principals individually
- Education officers individually

Guides were developed for the application of each type of interview as well as for the observation and the action research (see appendices 2-9). All of these guides specify the particular issues through which the themes of formative assessment, quality of teaching-learning, and happiness (GNH) are to be illuminated.

## **2. Implementation**

Since the Bhutanese researchers in our group were not acquainted beforehand with qualitative methods of scientific investigation, the weeklong gatherings in June 2012, September 2012, and October 2013 included methodological lectures together with the practical preparation of the case studies. Literature pertaining to our research theme as well as methodological texts have been selected for individual and joint study. Furthermore, as part of the common research project, Ph.D. student Karma Utha has been working on her thesis through ten months in Aalborg where she has also learned about qualitative research methods, and Søren Willert has visited the Bhutanese col-

leagues through altogether several months extra, where issues concerning the application of qualitative methods have also been discussed.

The time plan for attaining the data material was supposed to be approximately five days for two researchers per case – starting, however, with Samtse Higher Secondary School as a case study that was completed by the four Bhutanese researchers in common. The data collection for the seven case studies was accomplished during the late fall and early spring seasons starting in the fall of 2012 and ending in the spring of 2014. In our account of how the case studies were implemented, it is mandatory to explicate not only what happened, but also what did not progress in accord with our intentions.

In addition to the research group's methodological seminar in June 2012, the workshop in September 2012 included a special focus on action research with demonstration, discussion, and training in order to prepare the Bhutanese members of the research group for implementation of this method in the field research. Still, in some ways the collaborative aspect of resource building has not been sufficiently developed in time to carry through the empirical work as envisioned. It turned out to be too difficult to initiate action research in the case studies as planned. In each of the schools, the attempted beginning of a process of action research became more of an ordinary group interview. Though the element of action research was not carried out in the case studies reported here, application of the method was advanced through ongoing practical initiatives on the part of Søren Willert and through his study together with Nandu Giri of the newer history of the Bhutanese school system, which includes a focus on pedagogical and educational trends of action research. There are also shortcomings in the application of the other research methods, most of which must be explained by the very limited possibilities of collaboration between the Bhutanese and the Danish sides of the research group. Thus, the observation studies are generally rather shallow, and many issues taken up in the interviews could also have been further expanded. Obviously, these flaws do to a large extent derive from a lack of training. However, cultural tradition probably plays a part as well, in so far as many of the teachers and

pupils in the case studies are not accustomed to being observed in their daily practice, and long term participation might be required to get a more authentic picture of the teaching and learning processes. Likewise, teachers and principals may for traditional reasons tend to regard an interview as an inspection that calls for 'appropriate' or 'correct' answers rather than straightforward and perhaps unsettling responses. In many situations it was clearly up to the interviewer to create an open dialogue that could expand on the semi-structured form instead of an exchange of simple questions and answers that would cling to the precise wording of the issues being asked.

Each application of a method for a case study is manifested in a data document with its own registration number. The altogether more than 60 data documents are of quite different size and the informative richness of the documents also varies considerably. Unfortunately, some of the interviews were not recorded, so the transcription of these is based on notes taken during the interview. Most of the recorded interviews, but not all of them, were transcribed verbatim. Certain parts of the data documents are difficult or impossible to use, due to a writing form that mixes transcription and summary, lack of information about who is quoted when in group interviews, or a writing in English that is obscure or hardly understandable, and especially so for non-Bhutanese readers. Whereas English is exceedingly integrated in the Bhutanese school system, the teaching observed as well as the interviews (apart from some of the interviews with parents) would usually take place in English. However, writing in English can be challenging, since the Bhutanese mother tongue and dialects are not written languages.

The five varieties of informants interviewed – teachers, pupils, parents, principals, and educational officers – were all valuable respondents, though also presenting very different approaches to our themes. Most surprisingly, the group interviews with pupils turned out to be very rich on experiences, thoughts and perspectives that often appear to be rather particular to this singular group of interviewees.

The data documents from the cases of Drujeygang and Zhemgang were produced later than the others. However, the reading of these

documents has reinforced impressions and results obtained through the other case studies. After a first round of analyses, which led to a preliminary report at the beginning of 2014, Karma Utha has taken up further interviews in the case study schools of Gedu and Yoeseltse with a particular focus on the topic of formative assessment. In addition, she carried out the planned document analyses and interviews with educational officers. At the same time, the descriptions of the school settings were produced.

### **3. Empirical analyses**

Empirical analyses of the collected and transcribed data materials were initiated at the research group's workshop in Thimphu in October 2013 and continued until February 2014. We formed three subgroups to each carry out the empirical analysis of one of the subthemes: formative assessment, quality of teaching-learning, and happiness (GNH). Certain principles for carrying out the analyses were agreed upon in common and the groups also had opportunity in Thimphu to mutually present and discuss a first, provisional version of their analytical findings. Thus, three rather independent analyses have actually been carried out in parallel and with the same data material. However, the transcribed empirical material is clearly most rich and informative about the theme of quality of teaching-learning, and least concerning the theme of happiness. Obviously, that has influenced the analytical work as well as its outcome: there is simply much more complexity available for analysis in the first as compared to the second area. Though the three groups applied the same main techniques of empirical analysis – careful perusal, condensation and labeling – there were wide variations in the labour that the analyses called for, and that set the scene for different styles of presentation as well

To ensure an easily understandable presentation of our results, it was decided that each group should come up with about five and no more than ten statements that would be the exhaustive results of their analysis. The statements should be clear and significant, as well as defensible as solid findings (i.e. valid, reliable, and exemplary)

from the analysis. Furthermore, each such statement of a result from the analysis should be explicated briefly in about five lines. These statements and their brief explication were presented in the summary of our empirical findings (Part I, chapter 5). Behind this condensed outcome, each group would render the entire product of their empirical analysis in 10-20 pages as a separate part of the common project report on the empirical analysis of the case studies. These sub-reports are part II, III, and IV of our common report, *Final results of qualitative case studies*:

- 'Educating for happiness (GNH)' by Krishna Giri & Lone Krogh
- 'The quality of teaching-learning' by Nandu Giri, Hanne Dauer Keller & Søren Willert
- 'Formative assessment (FA) in the schools' by Karma Utha, Bhupen Gurung & Kurt Dauer Keller

The three subgroups have also reflected on and commented upon the outcome of the case studies as to the usability of the collected and transcribed data material (which was discussed in the above section on the case studies' implementation) as well as the solidity of the case studies. As it has been indicated, the question of solidity should eventually be discussed in relation to each of our altogether 15 results that are presented in the next section of this report. These particular discussions of the solidity of the single findings are left over to the analyses and interpretation in connection with our writing of articles about the research project and our findings. However, some overall remarks can be made as to the three criteria of the solidity: validity, transparency and exemplarity.

The *validity* of the results should be discussed against these criteria:

- The *clarity* of the result: is the finding immediately understandable within the perspective and themes of our research design, or does it require additional clarification?
- The *weight* of the result: density and extension of data pointing in the same direction, making the finding 'evident' (obvious).

- The *significance* of the result: is the finding a discovery of something genuine and profound, rather than something ostensible or superficial about the investigated matter?

These criteria were observed and are largely met in the analyses of the collected and transcribed data, though not always so strongly by the collection and transcription of the empirical material. With reference to the guides for data collection (cf. appendices 1-9), to the interviews with educational officers, and to the general experience of the Bhutanese field researchers, we consider that our research results are fairly genuine and accurate findings.

As to the *transparency* required for the reliability of the case studies, the present report is supposed to satisfy that aspect of the solidity, since the four parts of the report render the steps and decisions of the research process for others to ‘look us over the shoulder’.

The topic of *exemplarity* raises again the questions of how significant the findings are, but as themes of typicality and characterization in a broader – i.e. more theoretical-conceptual and cultural-historical – sense. This includes the result’s novelty (often regarded as more of a validity issue): explication of the finding’s surprising or reinforcing character. Exemplarity is judged about in relation to our experiential and conceptual pre-understanding together with the document analyses and descriptions of the school settings, which provide links between near and more remote contexts of the case studies. When the research group had its last working seminar in Lesbos, Greece in August 2014, the exemplarity of our results were estimated to be a sustainable basis for the conceptual discussion and theoretical interpretation of the quality of school education in Bhutan in our forthcoming research articles.



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## **PART VIII: APPENDICES**

## **Appendix 1: Guide for the document analysis (empirical themes)**

Three levels of concretization of the themes:

1. Reformulation of the research themes
2. What relevant kinds of written materials are there to be found?
3. Usage of written material to describe the various system levels (and the interaction level) as well as the empirical context of our project

Ad 1:

- a. What does literature say about the importance of feedback (among the other kinds of FA) in Bhutan?
- b. How is motivation and similar concepts (pupil centeredness, pupil's perspective, etc.) understood at various levels of the Bhutanese school system?
- c. What is written about the proximal zone of development and similar concepts (e.g. space of discretion and action) at various levels of the school system?
- d. What has been said (in public) about decline of quality of education?
- e. How does the rising unemployment influence GNH aspects of education?

Ad 2:

- a. What has been written about the hindrances for what we want to promote with our projects?
- b. What can we learn from written material produced by pupils?
- c. What can we learn from written material produced by teachers?
- d. What can we learn from text books and other teaching materials?

Ad 3:

- a. What are the urban / rural differences in the school's role in the society?

## **Appendix 2: Guide for the observation of teachers**

### **General matters**

Description of the classroom setting

Description of activities during the lesson

- Time management of the activities
- Participants in the activities (selected part of the class, everybody)
- Communication during the activities (one-way, interactive, dialog, discussion)

### **Formative assessment**

Structured forms of formative assessment – peer assessment, self-assessment and so on

Informal forms of formative assessment – feedback, questioning, discussion.

Teachers' learning by using formative assessment

Learning outcome

- mechanical learning versus understanding of principles or ability to use knowledge in practice
- content specific versus general competences like analytical ability or critical thinking

### **Teaches' support of learning**

How is the teacher trying to motivate students?

- relating to the life world of the student
- concrete examples/abstract presentations
- instrumental kind of motivation

How is the teacher maintaining the students' focus (mindfulness)

Teachers' sensitivity to the diversity among the students

### **GNH**

Explicit parts of GNH

Implicit parts of GNH

- Respect, understanding the students versus negative judgment of the student

- Atmosphere (open to students' expressions, creating student engagement)

## **Appendix 3: Guide for the observation of pupils**

### **Formative assessment**

Classroom-relevant output by pupil(s) is made subject to evaluative comments by teacher/peers.

Teacher initiates evaluative comments on pupil performance.

Pupil asks for evaluative comments on own performance.

Summative assessment of student product (e.g. homework) is followed by dialogue concerning evaluative details.

### **Motivation – Zone of proximal development (ZOPED)**

Individual learning-relevant initiatives from students that have not been called for by teacher/method.

Absence of irrelevant activities amongst pupils.

Global level / activity-specific level(s) of energy in classroom interaction.

### **GNH**

Explicit reference to formal GNH values.

Shared commitment (shown in conduct; compliance) to the 'programme' governing class activities.

Active expression of moral, society-relevant attitudes towards subject matter taught.

Pupils (singly/collectively) taking unrewarded GNH-relevant initiatives that go beyond the classroom 'programme'..

## Appendix 4: Guide for interview with teachers

### A: General teaching style (project-themes: Motivation – ZOPED)

There are many ways to be a teacher. We want to get a picture of your special profile. Generally speaking, how do YOU ensure that intended learning objectives are achieved by pupils? Feel free to use examples as well as guiding principles.

Now we'll ask questions about two specific teaching dimensions:

1. Do you have specific techniques for ensuring pupil motivation?
2. Do you have specific techniques for managing diversity in capacity among pupils ('weak pupils/strong pupils')?

### B: Assessment practices

Please tell me about the various assessment procedures that are included in your teaching practice (possibly grouped according to SA/FA/CA) – What? – How? – When?

How do you see the educational effects (positive/negative) of the various assessment procedures? – *apart from* their summative aspects (grading).

In our project, we take a specific interest in a number of assessment practices that may have an impact on pupils' learning. Our list looks like this (show list – which has yet to be developed!). Some of these assessment practices you may already have mentioned (point out, and summarise respondent's comments to these). For those not mentioned, I would like to know

1. Are they part of your teaching practice? – If yes, when? – how?
2. Do you find them valuable in a teaching-learning context? – please specify/elaborate

### C: GNH

GNH is based on a specific Bhutan-grown value orientation. Please tell me the most important ways in which YOU as a teacher translate GNH values into classroom practice?

In our project we are specifically interested in teachers' ways of enhancing –

1. A general atmosphere of wellbeing in the classroom

2. Shared commitment and social responsibility among pupils for classroom activities
3. Pupils' personal growth and development

(Ask respondent to comment on the three sub-questions one by one – in case the question-theme has already been touched upon by respondent, start by summarizing)

## **Appendix 5: Guide for group interview with pupils**

### **Quality of learning and education**

- How do you like a good teaching to be?
- When do you think, you learn the most?
- What do you think of the engagement of the students in the classroom?
- What can the teacher do to enhance students' participation?
- How does the teacher take into account, that there are differences of ability among the students?

### **Formative assessment**

- How are you assessed in the classroom/homework/projectwork? Grades/comments?
- What is your perception on the assessment of classwork/homework/projectwork? Does it help you to learn more?
- Are there possible negative effects of the assessment practice?
- When you have troubles understanding, how do you proceed? Do you get help from the teachers'/peers'/parents'/others

### **GNH**

- What is your perception of GNH? Has it influence you in some way?
- Is your school life influence by GNH?
- How are the teachers' trying to create a good classroom atmosphere?

## **Appendix 6: Guide for interview with parents**

### **The Quality of Teaching and Learning**

How are your sons/daughters doing in the school?

How important is education?

Are you happy with the education your child receive in the school?

Is your child motivated to go to school?

How do you support your child in the school work?

What do you think about the quality of teaching and learning in your child's school?

### **Formative assessment**

Does your child talk with you about the school work?

Do you take the initiative to talk with your child about his/her school work, if yes – how often do you do it?

If no – why not?

NB: IF the parents answer yes – you can continue with the following questions:

Are you content with the assessment process, which is going on in your child's school?

Do you talk with the child about the feedback she or he receives?

Does your child seek your help to react on the feedback, he/she receives from the teacher?

If your child is unhappy with the grade/feedback, how do you intervene (in relation to the school/in relation to your child)?

### **GNH**

Are you happy with your child's well-being in school. If yes – how do you know that your child is being well?

Does your child talk with you about GNH values, he/she learnt in the school?

Have you noticed any changes due to the introduction of the GNH philosophy in schools? If yes – tell us a little bit more about this.

What is your opinion about the philosophy of GNH on how it is practiced in schools?

Do you have any suggestions on how the schools might handle it in different ways?

## **Appendix 7: Guide for interview with principals**

Very simple, open question that have to be elaborated through dialogue

### **Quality of education**

How do you and your teaching staff ensure quality of education in your school?

Success stories?

Problem stories?

### **Formative assessment**

What is your opinion on the influence of summative/formative assessment practices on pupils' learning?

Have you ideas about the ideal weighting between formative and summative assessment (as 'pure types')?

### **GNH**

How do you and your teaching staff ensure that GNH values are implemented in the school and in the classroom setting?

Success stories?

Problem stories?

## **Appendix 8: Guide for interviews with education officers**

(district education officer, curriculum officer, education monitoring officer, Bhutan board of exams officer)

### **Quality of education**

How do you ensure quality of education in your work?

Success stories?

Problem stories?

### **Formative assessment**

What is your opinion on the influence of summative/formative assessment practices on pupils' learning?

Have you ideas about the ideal weighting between formative and summative assessment (as 'pure types')?

### **GNH**

How do you ensure that GNH values are implemented in the schools and in the classroom settings?

Success stories?

Problem stories?

## Appendix 9: Guide for the action research

(1) **FA/feedback theme** is easily operationalized into AR through observation-based interviews with teachers. In the following series of questions a descriptive phase (relating to the observed session) is followed by a prospective phase (engaging the respondent in small scale Action Learning experimentation):

- Interviewer's general (brief) introduction to project – with special reference to FA/feedback
- “We have observed session with you as teacher, what are your own general comments/assessments of what happened? ... (interviewer, is joining in, mirroring and sharing when the following sub-questions are answered – all the time respecting the respondent as an expert on her own experiential world):
  - Was it normal/typical? ...
  - Were there any special (non-typical) features? ...
  - Noteworthy, successful features? ...
  - Features you would have liked to work out better/improve? ...
  - Features linking specifically to FA/feedback? ... (maybe supplemented by interviewer's observations)
- Thinking back on the session as it unfolded, can you here and now think of ways and means to enhance/intensify its formative assessment features – in the form of feedback or otherwise?
- How can your ideas possibly be translated into (manageable) practice within the actual classroom setting?
- How can you assess whether your practical efforts work out as intended? ... Or, possibly, need modification? ... (Interviewer and respondent collaborate with a view to finding practical answers to these questions)

The above interview format combines an *action orientation* (finding practical ways to improve pupils' classroom-based teaching-learning, especially in the realm of FA/feedback) with a *research orientation* (getting case-based information about teachers' Zone of Proximal

Development in the area of FA/feedback – of potential interest for designers of future FA-enhancing programs).

**(2) Theme concerning pupils' Motivation + Zone of Proximal Development (ZOPED):** Knowledge concerning pupils' perspectives on these themes (they are the experts!) may serve as an important guideline for helping to improve teachers' classroom practices.

Method: Pupils' perspectives could be sampled, e.g. by asking focus groups of pupils from same class, first, to draw an 'intensity/excitement curve' (from 'boring/uninterested' to 'excited-curious-interested') on a 'structured time-line' representing a just finished (possibly observed) teaching session – followed by joint interview where individual curves are shared/interpreted/commented upon by all group members (e.g. "What made it exciting/boring? ... etc.) – aiming, not at a consensus, but at a variation of suggestive ideas, possibly reflecting individual pupils' learning style, gender, intellectual capability, subcultural background ... . Interviewer should also aim at clarifying differences between 'just being excited' (motivation as such) and feeling intellectually challenged in a positive manner (ZOPED).

Pupils' views could be sampled in October → analyzed in November → used as background for Action Research with teachers during Spring research activities: "These are samples/summaries of pupils' statements concerning Motivation + ZOPED → Action Learning interview (cf. above format) aimed at finding ways to enhance these two, supposedly teaching-learning improving variables of classroom practice.

### **(3) GNH-theme**

Lots of activities are already going on concerning the translation of GNH values into school activities. A stocktaking could be made. GNH could be made headline for facilitated action learning groups.

A number of schools could be involved as partners in action research activities within a GNH frame.

Example: Follow up on already existing GNH-inspired practices: "What are the effects of 'silent sitting' before the start of class?"

## Appendix 10: A statement example from our Reference index on formative assessment

St. no.	Statement	Sub themes under the statement	Case no 1	Case no 2	Case no 3	Case no 4	Case no 5
2	Formative assessment is sustained with divergent attitudes. (Tendencies to denigrate formative assessment coexist with good will towards formative assessment.)	Questioning	101-30, 111-58	202-109, 203-25, 210-171, 212-64, 213-34	301-20	404-45	509-34, 511-34, 513-37, 514-123, 518-58, 518-92, 518-133
		Peer assessment	102-46	202-89, 204-20, 207-86, 209-58, 210-154, 212-66, 214-364, 215-204, 216-152	302-63		502-72, 504-98, 507-110, 512-192
		Self-assessment	106-72	210-211, 212-327, 214-244, 217-299, 217-312, 218-227	302-70	404-129	510-212, 512-133, 514-148, 516-180, 518-207
		Feedback	102-36, 102-59, 104-28, 106-9, 106-78, 111-69	202-76, 204-23, 207-135, 209-61, 210-38, 210-84, 210-129, 210-261, 212-145, 212-385, 214-138, 215-70, 217-76, 218-152	305-82, 307-58, 307-177	404-37, 404-109, 407-37, 407-48, 408-28	502-111, 504-166, 507-66, 507-176, 508-71, 510-138, 510-171, 510-330, 512-44, 512-145, 514-73, 514-226, 515-40, 516-41, 517-59, 517-139, 517-244

## Appendix 11: Sample of language corrections in quotations

Version in the transcribed data material	Corrected version in this book
<p><i>What is your view on Student Centered learning?</i> I do practice and I find it very interesting because I came through teacher centered teaching which is bit difficult to understand. But student centered learning much more interactive and I must say their results are better than ours. I do practice so I don't want to have same situation like me (laughs). There, everybody is participating in student centered learning because when we distribute task, they do participate and then they come up with progress. (202-6)</p>	<p><i>What is your view on student centered learning?</i> I practice it and I find it very meaningful because as a school child I was exposed to teacher-centered teaching. Student centered learning is much more interactive and I feel certain that results are better. In student centered learning, when we distribute a task everybody is participating. Then learning takes place for everybody. (202-6)</p>
<p>But if the teacher is little strict then I feel little hesitation to go and ask questions. (407-56)</p>	<p>But if the teacher is not very strict then I feel little hesitation to go and ask questions. (407-56)</p>
<p>Through my experience, once I have experience a very strict teacher in mathematics, and from there on may be because strictness of the teacher I didn't have that much interest in maths though he teaches very well but due to the fear that I had inside with him I couldn't learn sir, so because of that I would say one is if teacher but not crossing the limitations, if the teacher is very frank, in the sense one way they should be strict but one way they are very frank not only very strict, there will be a very conducive learning environment.(307-33)</p>	<p>Once, I have experienced a very strict teacher in mathematics, and from then, maybe because of the strictness of the teacher, I didn't have that much interest in maths, though he teaches very well. Due to the fear of him that I had inside, I couldn't learn, sir. So, I would say, if the teacher is very frank, they should be strict but not only very strict, there will be a very conducive learning environment. (307-33)</p>
<p>Yes peer assessments normally I do in the class test. Right after though for the class test, I don't actually these marks would not be carried, it will not include in the final exam or from exam point of view. I take class test from their point of understanding, so after completing certain chapters, I take the classwork and I actually them to like if roll one to four, five like that way know, it will be distributed not their own, I dictate the mark. Actually the answers will be written on the board, I also give the side answers. (302-64)</p>	<p>Peer assessments I normally do in the class test, though not in tests where marks will be included in the final exam. I do these class tests to learn about their degree of understanding. After completing certain chapters, the tests are part of the classwork and I actually distribute test papers, e.g. from row one to four and so on, so nobody has their own paper. The correct answers will be written on the board. I dictate the marks from the students. (302-64)</p>

## Appendix 12: A school day in Bhutan

*13 years old Lucas Dauer Keller from Denmark accepted the invitation to spend a day in October 2013 with a class in Jigme Losel Primary School in Thimphu. The school was not among the ones in our case study. Next day he wrote in Danish the following narration, which was translated by Søren Willert.*

In the morning when I was driving to school I saw lots and lots of schoolchildren who used umbrellas as protection against the glaring sun. I saw dogs taking a nap in the middle of the street, and cows who are just doing their own thing, completely indifferent to their surroundings and crossing the street whenever and wherever they feel like it.

School day started at 8.30 with tidying the school area, this was the students' responsibility. Each group of students was responsible for cleaning up a particular space, and it must be done thoroughly. Apparently the students found it quite okay to start the day with this cleaning exercise, and they did a very good job.

The School Principal had assigned me to one class where I was supposed to stay for the entire school day. The teachers were nice and put much effort into giving me a good experience and a lot of new friends.

While the other children were still busy cleaning, my somewhat shy, yet also extremely friendly classmates offered me a guided tour of the school. We went to the meditation hall where three large tapestries were hanging, each with its special message. It was a small pavilion where the students did meditation every day except on Tuesdays (I was there on a Tuesday).

After the cleanup I entered their nicely decorated classroom. On all the walls large, colorful posters were hanging, carrying new messages, most of them either about keeping the Earth clean or about teamwork. The students were very well-mannered and they immediately cleared a seat for me. In a corner between two walls a little space was set aside for honoring their fifth King. Most places at the school showed pictures of him. In 'our' little classroom corner a bowl

with some kind of incense had been placed. When entering the classroom it was filled with an intense smell and taste of smoke, but later during the day they fortunately let some fresh air in. Opening the windows, however, meant that sounds of screaming and yelling from the schoolyard were given free access to the small crowded classroom.

The school day's first lesson dealt with what I understood as their version of social studies. Students were told about hygiene and what it really means. At this school hand washing was seen as immensely important. Each class had a special dance relating to hand washing. Later in the day these dances were performed.

After social studies followed math where they learned a bit about graphs. I noticed that, whereas in Denmark every student would have done their exercises individually, here everything was organized as group work. But whenever they discussed jointly in the whole class, it turned into a great shouting competition. Asking for talking space by raising your hand was definitely not their favorite cup of tea. Everyone was trying to shout their answer the loudest, so as to be the one student heard by the teacher.

After math my classmates showed me new parts of the school during a short break. At the end of a footpath all the messages that the students must remember were inscribed on a large wooden board. Then came the toilet which, actually, was simply a hole in the ground inside a small shed. Following that, we passed a colorful flower bed which the students were tending and enjoyed looking at. Then came the Principal's office where she sat working when not teaching. A lot of paths made connections within the whole school area. The central school area actually seemed like a large schoolyard surrounded by three building blocks where most of the classrooms were found. Much of the schoolyard ground was covered by large green plants, shaped like tunnels one might pass through. The school area included two more fields behind the blocks. One of the external spaces was where most of the students were eating during the lunch break. It was also here students performed their dance later in the day. The second was a gravel-covered area the size of a 7-a-side football pitch and that was actually what it was used for. The third external space was an oblong slope separated from the school yard by a fence. At

the entrance to the “slope area” a thick electric cord was hanging down, you had to bend in order to enter. This space was well covered with greenery, grass measuring 20 cm. all over the place. At one end some tractor tires were lying around, used by students for seating. Last year students had sown some big plants facing the entrance, they had already reached the height of 60-70 cm.

Now was the time for a test, the teaching subject was Belief. The students were excited, and the teacher stood at the blackboard writing some 10-12 questions. The students started the answering exercise without further notice. They worked quietly and concentrated. When the lesson finished an errand boy came along with some fried potatoes, some vegetables and a 600 ml. Coca Cola for me. Then, with the whole school as spectators to my luxury meal, my class moved to the place where they used to eat, the slope area. But the tractor tires were all occupied so we went to the other end of the slope.

When we got there we sat down and started eating, I was amused by my classmates’ Indian accent. When I’d had enough, but still had some potatoes and vegetables left, I asked if someone would taste, but they didn’t like the idea of eating my food. Instead they led me to a group of old poor persons sitting in a corner of the schoolyard and eating leftovers from the pupils’ lunch packages. Unlike the students, they were very pleased to have my food. I do find it a bit strange that old poor people are sitting in a schoolyard waiting to get food from the pupils. But they were nice and they were not actually begging to get the food. As a matter of fact, they were quite well stocked. Altogether they were five and they shared a table filled with baskets, most of them containing rice and chili.

After the break it was time for the national language: Dzongkha. I didn’t understand a lot of what went on, but I noticed that after each lesson the students spent fifteen minutes with their booklet writing everything down in their prettiest Dzongkha handwriting. Most of the pupils had Western pencil cases and school bags, and it is a kind of funny sight to watch them walk around in their impressive national dress ... with a Ben-10 rucksack and a Barbie pencil case.

The classroom-based school day ended with yet another test, this time in physics and chemistry. The students were allowed to move

out of the classroom and do the test outside in the sun. I asked one of the boys if they normally had so many tests. He said they had them all the time, but I don't know if he was the most reliable source.

After school we played a lot of football. The pitch was located right next to a road with lots of traffic. At one point one of the students kicked the ball on to the road and broke a passing car's side mirror. In no time all students were swarming out to see what had happened, and the poor family in the car seemed more shaken by the amount of children yelling and encircling their car than by their damaged side mirror. The rules of the game they played by were quite similar to Danish ones. Many years' lack of maintenance had left its mark on the pitch. One goal was missing both its crossbar and one post. Neither was the ball in a very good shape. Many of the students actually arrived at school in the morning wearing their soccer sports-wear under the national dress and carrying boots in their bag. Now, I did feel obliged to tell them that it's not a good idea to use boots when playing on a hard surface such as toughened soil or gravel. Not only do you risk twisting your ankle, your boots also get worn out a lot faster. But I guess they just took a look at my old tattered running shoes and thought that I wasn't much of an authority on the subject.

After some hours of football the class I had visited was supposed to present their dance. During that whole afternoon all classes, starting with the smallest and finishing with Class 6 – which was 'my' class – would do a dance performance. In Denmark I'm actually in 7<sup>th</sup>, yet their English was just as good as mine. In the rest of the teaching subjects they are about as good as a Class 6 in Denmark. In Bhutan all subjects except Dzongkha are taught in English, so no wonder students learn English well. As I already mentioned, all the dances dealt with hand washing and the Class 6-dance was made up as a parody of Michael Jackson's *Beat it*.

After the dance we played some more football before I was collected.

## Appendix 13: Publications from the research project

Giri, K.P. & L. Krogh (2014). 'Gross National Happiness: A cross-examination of ideology and practices in Bhutanese Secondary Schools', Paper presented at the international *Creative University Conference* 14.-16. April 2014 in Thimphu.

Giri, K.P. & L. Krogh 2015. *Educating for happiness*. Final results of qualitative case studies. Part IV of Research report on the Quality of school education in the perspective of gross national happiness and assessment practices in Bhutan. Royal University of Bhutan & Aalborg University.

Giri, N., K.P. Giri, B. Gurung, H.D. Keller, K.D. Keller, L. Krogh, K. Utha & S. Willert (forthcoming). *Quality of School Education in Bhutan – A survey of student centered education in Bhutanese secondary schools*. Submitted for publication in *Bhutan Journal of Research and Development*.

Giri, N., H.D. Keller & S. Willert (2015). *The quality of teaching-learning*. Final results of qualitative case studies. Part III of Research report on the Quality of school education in the perspective of gross national happiness and assessment practices in Bhutan. Royal University of Bhutan & Aalborg University.

Giri, N. & K.D. Keller (2013): 'Quality of Education in the Perspective of Happiness'. Paper presented at the international workshop and seminar *Development challenges in Bhutan* in Copenhagen 29.-30. May 2013.

Giri, N. & S. Willert (2014) *Schooling and school history in Bhutan as part of a nation-building exercise*. Paper read at the international 'Creative University Conference', Thimphu, April 14-16, 2014

Gurung, B. K. Utha & K.D. Keller (2014). 'Feedback practices in higher secondary schools in Bhutan: A perspective'. Paper presented at the international *Creative University Conference* 14.-16. April 2014 in Thimphu.

Keller, K.D. (2013). 'The dialectic of recognition and identity'. Paper presented at the *XXIII World Congress of Philosophy* in Athens August 2013.

Keller, K.D. (2014). 'The corporeity of organizational sense'. In K.M. Jørgensen & C. Largacha-Martinez (Eds.): *Critical Narrative Inquiry - Storytelling, Sustainability and Power*. Nova Science Publishers.

Keller, K.D. (Ed.) (2015). *Overview*. Final results of qualitative case studies. Part I of Research report on the Quality of school education in the perspective of gross national happiness and assessment practices in Bhutan. Royal University of Bhutan & Aalborg University.

Keller, K.D. (2016). 'Character and existence in the good life'. Paper presented at the conference on *Happiness, Wellbeing and The Good Life - Perspectives and Applications* January 2016 in Odense.

Krogh, L. & K.P. Giri (forthcoming). 'Gross National Happiness in Bhutanese Education – How is it implemented in practice?' In B. Lund (Ed.): *Emotions in Teaching and Learning*. Sense Publishers.

Seden, K., Willert, S. & Dorji, S. *Impact of women's education on the academic achievement of their children in Bhutan Primary and Secondary Schools: An Enquiry*. Paper read at Conference on Population and development. Sherubtse College, October 9-10, 2014

Utha, K. (2015). *Formative Assessment practices in Bhutanese Secondary Schools and its impact on Quality of Education*. Pd.D. Dissertation. Aalborg University Press.

Utha K., B. Gurung & K.D. Keller (2015). *Formative assessment in the schools*. Final results of qualitative case studies. Part II of Research report on the Quality of school education in the perspective of gross national happiness and assessment practices in Bhutan. Royal University of Bhutan & Aalborg University.

Utha, K. & H.D. Keller (2013). 'Pedagogical Discourse in Bhutanese School System'. Paper presented at the international workshop and seminar *Development challenges in Bhutan* in Copenhagen 29.-30. May 2013.

Utha, K. & H.D. Keller (2014). 'Pedagogical discourses in Bhutanese school system'. Paper presented at the international *Creative University* Conference 14.-16. April 2014 in Thimphu.

Utha, K. & K. D. Keller (2013). 'Continuous Assessment in Bhutan'. Paper presented at the international workshop and seminar *Development challenges in Bhutan* in Copenhagen 29.-30. May 2013

Willert, S. (2013). 'Action research as an asset within development strategy for universities – with special reference to Bhutan'. Paper presented at the international workshop and seminar *Development challenges in Bhutan* in Copenhagen 29.-30. May 2013.

Willert, S. (2014a) *Action research as a strategic development asset for universities – with special reference to Bhutan*. Paper read at ICUN-Conference (International Creative Universities Network), Thimphu, Bhutan, April 14-16, 2014.

Willert, S. (2014b) *Research informed teaching at RUB? – A Danish contribution*. Paper read at Seminar on Research-Informed Teaching, Samtse College of Education, October 16-17, 2014 (to be published in Autumn 2016 volume of *Education, Innovation and Practice*, Samtse).





The research project group