

## What is RTE? Some Ways of Making Education Accessible

Title of the Book	: <i>What is RTE? Some Ways of Making Education Accessible</i>
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The Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 has high recall value. In other words teachers have heard of it and most of them would be able to articulate about it in varying degrees. However, the lay person, including teachers, would not have gone through the RTE Act itself. Not that it is not accessible – it has been published for general information and is on the Government of India website – but that the hazy impression that most people have about laws and Acts is that they are written in obtuse legal terms, incomprehensible to the general public. The need is felt for books and reading material that de-mystify the laws of the land. The book under review is one such, titled ‘What is RTE? Some Ways of Making Education Accessible’, the book has been developed with the objective of creating awareness among teachers and to equip them with

the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for effective implementation of the RTE Act. The book has six modules. The first one, ‘Understanding the RTE Act’ introduces the reader to the ten functions of the RTE Act, by gently leading him/her through the items of the first page of the Act: the national emblem, date and place of publication, the Act itself and its purpose. As the reader begins to gain confidence, the book provides activities to encourage him/her to go through the Act itself. ‘Read the Act and identify the functions that this Act serves’ (p. 3) can be done individually; ‘Read the Act and match sections and clauses of various functions’ (p. 5) can be done in a small group. The second module discusses concepts such as punishment, discrimination, bullying and harassment, and helps readers to develop a deeper level of

sensitivity and understanding. For instance, the word ‘punishment’ generally brings to mind corporal punishment, whereas the term includes presenting an undesirable experience and/or removal of a desirable one (p. 31). The third module focuses on a learner-centered classroom. One of the activities (p. 45) in this module encourages the reader to reflect on his/her own personal opinion regarding “good teaching”. Most importantly, the book explains that no classroom is completely ‘teacher- centric’; it is a question of degree. This idea is brought out by contrasting two classroom transcripts (pp. 52-53). The fourth module is on the purpose and development of assessment plans. Three existing practices of evaluation in elementary schools are compared for teachers to reflect upon (pp. 67-79). Different methods of assessment in various curricular areas are discussed. The multiple layers of school management, building of partnerships and networking among stakeholders, as well as their roles in democratic participatory decision-making are discussed in the fifth module. The Constitution and functions of the School Management Committee (SMC) as listed in the RTE Act and stated in model rules developed by MHRD are provided. Examples of SMCs in Uttarakhand, Assam and the Andaman and Nicobar islands contribute to a deeper understanding of the concept. The last module concentrates on the concept of age-appropriate admissions and classes as well as the need for

and nature of special training required for it. The objective and duration of the special training, along with development of learning material for such training are discussed, including emphasis on an in-built flexibility to accommodate Children with Special Needs. The example of the special training programme of Gujarat offers the reader a glimpse of how online information software can be utilised for getting details of out-of-school children. Peer tutoring in helping late entrants and the role of heterogeneous groups in contributing to attaining of desired levels of learning are brought out in the examples using science and mathematics (pp. 120-121).

A copy of ‘The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009’ is included as Annexure III in the book. The Act itself runs into thirteen pages and is divided into seven chapters. The point of including the Act as a sort of ready reference for the activities is not to classify responses as right or wrong, but to encourage readers to engage critically with the Act. Throughout the book, the language is simple and the tone measuring. Snippets such as the case of *Brown vs. the Board of Education in U.S.*, which resulted in children of colour being admitted in schools and more recently, the Delhi High Court Order ensuring that private schools abide by the terms of the contract under which they received free land, add a contemporary dimension to the book. All these add up to a book that truly makes RTE accessible.

– VARADA M. NIKALJE